

A to Z

WORLD

Women in Culture & Business



175 Countries

Position in Society * Legal Rights * Education

Dating, Marriage, and Family * Health

Interesting Social Customs * Women in Professions

Women as Business Owners * Foreign Businesswomen



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A to Z

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Afghanistan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Afghanistan society is male-dominated. The family is given a lot of importance, and the roles of men within families are to be the bread winners, while women are responsible for taking care of the house and children. Practices like endogamous marriages (parallel and cross-cousin marriages), patrilineal inheritances (in the male order), and patrilocal customs (married women moving to their husband's kin group or clan) are quite widespread. The Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001 made life a living hell for Afghan women. They could not work, go out of the house without a male escort, get an education, or seek medical help from a male healthcare professional. They had to be covered from head to toe in a *burqa*, a long outer robe-like garment which has only a mesh near the eyes and nose to enable the women to see and breathe. Such suppression forced many women to forgo their jobs and turn to begging or prostitution for sustenance. The advent of the democratic government has slowly led to a regaining of their rights.

The new constitution of Afghanistan gives men and women equal rights and duties. Women are slowly entering the professional arena and climbing the ladder to higher positions at work. There are many Afghani women now who are very successful professionally, and such women belonging to a higher social or economic class are treated with respect. They are also exempted from wearing the *burqa*, though many still continue to wear it. The new government has opened hundreds of schools for both boys and girls, and over 100,000 girls were enrolled in schools in just one province in that year.

In terms of economic independence, cultural barriers still remain for women. In rural areas, for instance, women are not even allowed to go out of the house unescorted. Forced marriages of girl children and violence against women are still commonplace. Even the courts have been known to overlook the general plight of women.

Women are expected to dress conservatively and modestly. They should not show any bare skin, especially from the neck downwards. Headscarves are also mandatory in some families. Professional women wear loose, knee-length business skirts along with trousers under the skirt. Many women also continue to wear a *burqa*.

Legal Rights

The new constitution, which came into effect in January 2004, gives equal rights to men and women. Women were not allowed to participate in politics until then, but now Afghan women have the right to vote and to run for office, and they made up around 40 percent of the more than 10 million registered voters in 2004. There are also reserved seats in the parliament for women – 25 percent in the lower house and 17 percent in the upper house. There are 102 women members out of the total 500 members in the constitutional *Loya Jirga* (Grand Council). There were also two women (out of nine) in the Constitutional Drafting Committee and seven women (out

of 35) in the Constitutional Review Commission. President Hamid Karzai appointed two women appointed to the Judicial Commission at its inauguration. The December 2004 cabinet had three women ministers holding the portfolios for women's affairs, martyrs and disabled, and youth affairs. A woman also heads the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission is also headed by a woman.

The United States has put in place several programs for Afghani women aimed at increasing their political participation and making them equal and active members of civil society. Women also have the right to drive and to own, sell, and inherit property.

Women are allowed to have an abortion until the third month of pregnancy, but only if the pregnancy is detrimental to the mother's health and the woman has obtained permission from the health ministry and acquires certificates from three different medical professionals.

Education

During the Taliban rule, girls were forbidden to attend school. With the advent of democracy, girls in great numbers have started attending schools. Around five million children enrolled in school in 2003, out of which 40 percent were girls. Regrettably however, the present government has upheld a 70's rule that prevented married women from attending high school – causing the expulsion of more than 3,000 women from schools. Also, traditional prejudices in rural areas has impeded women seeking education and employment. There have been instances where schools have been burned down and girls poisoned for attempting to go to school. These types of incidences are more prevalent in provinces like Kandahar where people still live under the fear of the Taliban.

The total literacy rate in Afghanistan is just 36 percent, out of which the male rate is 51 percent and the female rate 21 percent. Educated women are getting back to their jobs as teachers, doctors, and other professionals after years of enforced absence. Opportunities are still limited however, and there is discrimination against women joining some sectors.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Afghan women are still forced into arranged marriages. Women have absolutely no right to select their partners, which is entirely at the discretion of male family members. Marriage of girls with older men is also common – the main reason cited for this is mitigation of debt, as the groom gives a dowry to the girl's family. Legally, the marriageable age is 18 years, but many girls in their early teens are still forced into marriage.

Open dating is not approved or practiced in Afghanistan. Professional men and women may meet and socialize in group settings, but close interaction of the sexes is frowned upon in Afghan society; and even men from educated families can be very conservative in their attitude toward women. According to Islamic law, a man can marry up to four women, but with approval from the courts (and his wives) he can marry more than four

women. Traditionally, women get to retain their family name, as well as any money and property they may have obtained, both before and after marriage, but this can be difficult to enforce.

Women have a legal right to obtain divorce on the grounds of a husband's insanity, impotence, or non-payment of maintenance. Domestic violence is not enough of a reason for filing for divorce. Obtaining divorce without the cooperation of the husband is very difficult and almost impossible. Women are not granted custody of children upon divorce or the death of the husband – the husband, or his family, gets custody of the children.

Health

Healthcare services in Afghanistan are very poor. Access to emergency and specialist services is almost impossible. The maternal mortality rate is 1,600 per 100,000 women, and more in certain provinces. Lack of proper family planning, poor prenatal care, scarcity of medication and trained medical professionals, and lack of knowledge of hygiene contribute to the high rate of maternal mortality, and the government is struggling to tackle this problem. Afghan women don't have access to, or control over, family planning methods like birth control or spacing of children, due to traditional Islamic reservations.

Interesting Social Customs

There are some specific procedures for obtaining a divorce. One of them is the *iddah*, a waiting period of three months after the divorce. During the *iddah*, family members and relatives try to convince the couple to reconcile. Another objective of the *iddah* is to determine whether the woman is pregnant. In case she is pregnant, the husband will have to take care of her until the child is born. Divorced women with very small children are allowed to nurse their children for two years, during which time the husband has to bear the cost of maintenance of both mother and child.

Women in Business

General View

The legacy of the previous Taliban regime still holds strong in most areas of Afghanistan. Under their strict Islamist hard-line policies, women were not allowed to venture from their homes, let alone find employment.

Afghanistan is a strongly male-dominated society and those perceptions are bound to take some time to change. Women in Afghanistan who wish to find a job or start a business are faced with an array of social, cultural, and economic barriers. The biggest barrier is often to be found at home, with most husbands and relatives strongly discouraging women from venturing out of home.

A beginning however has been made after the formation of the democratic government, and long-held views relating to women holding jobs and doing business is gradually changing. The most obvious signs of the change appear in the increased number of shops and other small businesses run by women.

Legal Rights

According to the recent Afghan constitution, women are granted the same legal rights as men in every respect,

including the right to vote, to own a business, and to inherit and own property. In reality, however, most Afghans strongly disapprove of women performing any of the above functions. A survey conducted by a Kabul-based research group found that less than two percent of women among the 360 households covered in the survey owned land in their own right.

Though times are slowly changing, there remains a large gap in the pay packages of men and women performing the same job. The main issue, however, is not the difference in pay but the fact that women are actually allowed to take up jobs.

Women in Professions

The most common traditional job for women in Afghanistan is carpet-making. With women having to overcome incredible odds to do something as simple as holding an outside job, it comes as no surprise that only a few Afghan women have managed to summon up the courage to cross traditional barriers and start businesses of their own. One of them is Fatimeh, who owns two beauty salons in the capital city of Kabul. Though she had to overcome numerous obstacles early on, she is now firmly established, and clients must make appointments weeks in advance to avail of her services. Another is Aziza Mohmmand, who runs a leather football manufacturing factory. Growth rates for women in business are bound to follow an upward trend, with more and more women coming out of homes to start businesses. Though women are theoretically not barred from any professions, most Afghan men dislike their womenfolk leaving the house, and even when they are allowed to do so, they are prevented from mixing with members of the opposite sex. Since males dominate most business and employment sectors in Afghanistan, women are placed in a very difficult situation. Dress codes have relaxed considerably from the days of the Taliban regime, when women could venture from home only after covering themselves completely from head to toe. Today, Afghan women are expected to dress very conservatively, and most women wear a *burqa* covering the entire body from the neck downwards while in public. Office attire typically consists of a headscarf, a knee-length loose skirt, and loose-fitting professional trousers underneath.

Under the Afghan constitution, women are guaranteed access to health and childcare, though state-sponsored child care is currently unavailable.

Women as Business Owners

The number of women who own their business remains very low, given the social and political hurdles they have to overcome to establish their own businesses. However, the situation has improved, and more women are venturing out to start their own businesses, with some even traveling abroad to promote their products.

Women-owned businesses typically consist of beauty parlors, small textile factories, handicraft workshops, leather factories, and jewelry shops.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are expected to follow the prevailing social and cultural customs that bind Afghan women. When presented with a business card it is necessary for the presenter to see the recipient studying it. Probing questions about one's family are not welcome.

Men and women do not shake hands. When walking down a street, foreign women are strongly advised to keep their eyes lowered and to follow conservative dress codes (headscarves and no exposed skin apart from one's hands). A man speaking directly to a woman on the street means he is dishonoring her, so do not respond in such a situation.

When invited to one's home for tea, foreigners will find their glass being constantly refilled. A simple "No" will not

suffice to stop one's hosts. The proper method of indicating that one has had enough is by covering the glass with one's hand and saying "*bus*," which means "enough". Fridays are weekly holidays in Afghanistan. During the holy month of Ramadan, all Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. This fasting includes abstaining from food, drink, cigarettes, and even gum. Although foreigners are not required to fast, performing any of the above-mentioned activities in public is not allowed.

Albania

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditional Albanian society considered women subordinate to men, seeing them primarily as providers of home and childcare and as field laborers. The Communist government did much to empower women during the 1960s and 1970s, granting Albanian women equality with men in job opportunity and pay as well as in political and social rights. The transition to democracy, ironically, instead of improving women's empowerment, has brought back the once-dormant male-centric attitudes of Albanian society, and many women are now finding themselves marginalized in political and economic arenas. Women also suffered setbacks on economic fronts after 1991. Many of the female workers who occupied 80 percent of the jobs in light industry found themselves without jobs after privatization.

Albanian women traditionally wear skirts, aprons, headscarves (and sometimes veils) decked out with bright and colorful embroidery.

Legal Rights

Although the Albanian constitution grants equal rights to women in all areas of life – political, social, and economic – the cultural traditions of the country have impeded the implementation of these legal rights. Women still have the right to vote, but the number of elected female legislators has decreased from a high of 30 percent at the end of the Communist period to only 5.7 percent (8 women out of 140 MPs).

The right to own and inherit property is also legally protected, but the patriarchal mentality prevalent in Albania means that male children still generally inherit the family property. In many parts, Albanians overtly follow a code of ethics called the *Kanun*, according to which only men have the right to inherit the property.

Under law both the parents have responsibility for the maintenance of children up to 18 years of age, or 25 years in case of students. The person who requests guardianship (normally the mother) obtains the custody of children. The Family Code provisions for women have made it easier for women to obtain divorces in Albania. Albanian women are granted the right to have abortions if they receive proper counseling regarding the health hazards of abortion and alternatives (such as adoption) available to them.

Education

The Albanian constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender, but in practice, women have fewer opportunities in education and jobs than men. The law has made eight years of primary education compulsory for all children of both sexes. In urban areas, 52 percent of girls who completed primary school continued their studies in high school, whereas in rural areas only 28 percent of the girls did so, compared to 72 percent of the boys. Despite these education levels, women generally still do not enjoy equal opportunities and treatment with men in the workplace. Rural girls often discontinue studies due to a cultural view that their education would be a "waste" when they marry.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Albanian women usually do not date. Women meet men only in social gatherings and family get-togethers. Traditional Albanians prefer marriages at an early age in order to protect girls from losing their virginity before marriage. Traditionally, Albanian marriages are arranged by parents with the help of a matchmaker. In some areas, Albanians often conduct betrothals between infant children in order to ensure family alliances. Generally, women take their husband's name after marriage. Though polygamous marriages existed in a few areas up to the beginning of the twentieth century (particularly for the reason that the first wife did not bear any children), monogamy is the norm in Albania.

Despite laws to the contrary, women do not enjoy equal rights in inheriting property and seldom own assets separate from their husbands. Divorces have become more common recently. Wives are not entitled to alimony after divorce, and both parents contribute to the child's care until the age of 18.

Albanian society still prefers boys over girls at birth. Albanians have a high birth rate due to their belief that more male children mean more security in their old age. Pregnant women are typically greeted with *të lindtënjëdjalë* ("may a son be born"). In some areas the birth of a girl is marked by painting the beam of the house in black, as a symbol of displeasure. Societal prejudices make life difficult for a childless woman.

Health

Women have equal access to medical care, but the high level of bribery in the medical care system sometimes restricts their access. The Albanian constitution legalized

abortion and introduced modern family planning methods in public health services in 1992, and this resulted in an increase in the life expectancy of women. However, many women still rarely use contraception due to cultural taboos and the fear of side effects. These factors have led to the practice of "back-street abortions" and a high rate of maternal mortality. Generally, women feel they need the consent from their men to make health care decisions.

Interesting Social Customs

In some mountain regions of Albania they still practice the peculiar custom of "stealing the bride," where an armed bridegroom or his male relatives stage a mock abduction of the bride prior to the wedding. In Northern Albania, a male relative of the bride presents the groom with a bullet wrapped in straw, to imply that the new husband has the right to kill his wife (with the approval of her family) if she proves disobedient. The code of *Kanun* allows a woman to "become a man" under certain conditions: when a woman chooses not to marry her prearranged husband and she remains unmarried. Another way for a woman to enjoy the freedoms and privileges denied to women by traditional society is to become a 'sworn virgin.' Parents without sons in their family often encourage this course of action. After a woman has become a 'sworn virgin' she is required to dress and act like a man.

Women in Business

General View

Albanian women are slowly but surely joining the work force in increasing numbers. The taboos that confined them to the role of homemakers are gradually dissolving as education and social awareness lead to significant changes in the Albanian outlook toward women. The initial post-Communist years saw women working mainly as teachers, primary healthcare workers, typists, stenographers, and bank employees. While many women still hold these positions or play the traditional roles of homemaker and field laborer, many have entered the fields of science, technology, agriculture, journalism, law, and research and are beginning to occupy senior managerial and administrative positions.

Legal Rights

Albanian women gained the right to vote in 1920. Although they can legally inherit and own property, sons or other male heirs continue to exclusively enjoy property and inheritance rights in some parts of Albania. Legal interventions in such situations usually redress women's grievances.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Albanian women worked mainly in the fields of agriculture, weaving, and handicrafts. They were also active in marketing their produce at the wholesale and retail level. Over the years, however, education and technology has redefined their standing in society. In 1998, about 17.5% of private firms were managed by women as opposed to the 82.5% by men. The fields of education, science, law, research, and journalism have seen women in mid- to high-level positions, although women are still a minority at top decision-making levels. Female heads of companies, though not a familiar sight, are slowly making their presence felt in boardrooms.

Some of the few top female business executives and owners are: Emira Goshka, technical director of production at Alb-Santorini; Magdalena Kovaci, owner of Interkonfeksione (a renowned confectionary company); and, Gelinike Shegani, owner of the Koran Fish Breeding Enterprise.

Education and contemporary culture have brought about changes in women's taste for clothes, too. Although many companies permit the traditional Albanian dress, a lot of women professionals are wearing more comfortable and fashionable Western wear.

Children of working women are mainly cared for by grandparents or mothers, although sometimes fathers take time off from work to share in looking after children. State-run Rargete and Day Care Centers for children of working mothers are also mushrooming in many parts of Albania, though this system still doesn't have the necessary financial and social support.

Women as Business Owners

Women own small-sized agricultural, manufacturing, and retail firms. Many women also own retail and wholesale outlets of agricultural produce.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen will find the local businesspeople - men and women alike - warm and friendly. As punctuality is almost second nature to them, it is crucial to arrive on time for all business engagements. Formal business suits, or informal trousers with jackets or shirts, are appropriate attire for all seasons. The people of Albania like to get down to business soon after initial pleasantries. An informal tea or lunch usually follows business engagements. Official dinner invitations are rarely given to visiting businesswomen. A cordial and pleasant manner that expresses appreciation for even the smallest gestures of kindness and courtesy helps establish a good business rapport with the local businesspeople.

Algeria

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Algerian culture has traditionally required women to be subservient to men, and women seldom had contact with men other than with male family members. Although the relatively secular military government has tried to improve the social and economic conditions of women, they have had to contend with the opposition from fundamentalist Islamic groups.

In the patriarchal and patrilineal culture of Algeria, the senior male member makes all the major decisions affecting the family welfare and represents the family in dealings with outsiders. Algerian men definitely consider women the weaker sex, and women's actions and activities are scrutinized to ensure that their modesty and chastity are maintained in honor to protect the family's honor.

In 1954, under French colonial rule, only 4.5 percent of Algerian women knew how to read and write, 3 percent were employed outside the home, less than 4 percent attended university, and 84 percent of women aged over 15 were married.

After 1962, conditions improved for women due to the increased educational level of family members, broader economic and social development, and the willingness or necessity for large number of women to seek productive employment. Many women have occupations in the state sector as teachers, nurses, physicians, and technicians. Though the official statistics show a lesser percentage, women may constitute a higher percentage in the active work force. Algerian women have predominance in the medical field accounting for 51.1 percent of all medical posts. Women are discriminated against in decision-making areas like politics and public administration, where they are much less represented.

The ethnic groups in Algeria have varied concepts regarding gender. The *Kayble* women do not have rights to inherit property and need the consent of their husband who divorced them to remarry. The *Chaouia* women, believed to have special magical powers, hold a slightly higher status despite the social restrictions. The *M'zabites* promote social equality and literacy for men and women within their villages but do not allow women to leave their village boundaries.

Women in the cities usually dress in modern clothes but always cover their hair with a scarf. Traditional women wear a blouse and skirt – with a long, full robe draped over them – in public.

Legal Rights

Women do have access to equal rights with men, but the social pressure against women inhibits the effective implementation of equality laws. Algeria granted women suffrage in the year 1962. The law has provisions granting women the right to inherit property, the right to study, work, and drive a car, and the right to enter public life. Women may own businesses, enter into contracts, and

pursue opportunities in government, medicine, law, education, the media, and the armed forces.

Article 304 of the Penal code deems abortion illegal except in cases when it is necessary to save the life or the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman. Anyone illegally performing abortions faces a penalty of five years imprisonment and a fine of up to 10,000 dinars, and may lose the right to practice.

The father normally holds the legal guardianship of the children, and mothers receive custody of children only upon the death of the father. Females under 19 years old may not travel abroad without the consent of the father.

Women may claim for divorce only on specified grounds, such as desertion or imprisonment of the husband. If the wife seeks a divorce because of incompatibility, she may obtain it only by paying money to her husband in exchange for her freedom – a practice called *khul*.

Education

Women have better access to higher education than to employment, political power, or personal independence. Out of the total enrollment at all levels of schooling (from primary through university) women constitute 40 percent of students. The new generation of women has better education than men of the same age group.

In the rural areas, many girls drop out of school when they reach 10 to 13 years of age. According to the estimate of UNESCO, literate men constituted 69.8 percent and literate women 45.5 percent in Algeria. Schools do not permit little girls and boys to sit or play together. Despite legal equality between men and women, women have limited access to certain jobs. With more girls entering the field of vocational training once reserved for men, new job opportunities have opened up for women.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, the parents of the couple or a professional matchmaker arrange marriages in Algeria, which are considered as a union of not just two individuals but of two families. Algerian women and men do not socialize much together, and their culture does not approve of dating. Women can normally meet men only in public or social settings. The legal age for marriage is 18. Following the Islamic custom, women do not take their husband's name in marriage. Though the Koran legally permits polygamy, Algerian men rarely have polygamous marriages.

Women spend most of their time at home taking care of domestic chores and childrearing. Algerian society does not regard it bad if a woman is childless. In case of a divorce, women receive custody of children under age seven, but the husband regains custody when the children are older.

Health

Algerian women had achieved equal rights to health care by 2000. At the time of independence, the Algerian health care system had one physician per 33,000 people, but it has now risen to one doctor for 1,200 inhabitants. In remote rural areas, women find it difficult to access

medical facilities. Women have the liberty to make their own decisions regarding their healthcare needs. More than 50 percent of women in the reproductive age (15-49 years) practice some kind of birth control in Algeria.

Women in Business

General View

Algerian women had to break many social barriers before venturing into work of any kind outside their homes. The struggle against social and religious roles of submission were not easy for women to overcome, as they were exposed to many threats from Islamic fundamentalists; but women have made substantial strides toward social equality. In the beginning, women found employment chiefly in education and the clerical fields, particularly in the banking sector. Algerian women used education as the key to their social progress and, today, Algeria can boast many qualified women in medicine, journalism, business, and the judiciary.

Legal rights

Algeria is an Islamic country, and *Sharia* (Islamic legal codes) heavily influence the legal system. The country's relatively secular military rulers have tried, however, to rein in the fundamentalists in order to offer a certain degree of equality and equal opportunity to women. By law, women now have equal rights with men in matters of employment and pay. Women have the right to vote, and a general drift towards active participation in political life has also been noted since the 2002 elections. Even though the number of women elected to office is insignificant, many women hold senior civil service posts.

Algerian women's inheritance rights are still being debated. In certain parts of Algeria, women inherit a small share of her husband's property on his death, while in other areas the entire estate goes to the sons or other male relatives. In the more educated and urban areas, women enjoy greater control over their husband's property. They also have better access to credit for their business activities.

Women in Professions

It took a long time for Algerian women to break out of their traditional submissive roles. When they started entering the non-agricultural work force, it was mostly in the widely accepted female professions of nursing, teaching, and secretarial work. The gradual but determined progress of women in education brought about visible changes in their employment opportunities. The fields of medicine, law, banking, journalism, and information technology now have women in various capacities, though their number still remains small. There are a few female heads of companies like Najjat Belbachir, who is managing director for a unit of Plastic Transformation; she is also the founding member of the Association of Women Managers in the country. Nadia Belkhiri is a member of the Executive Council of the Forum of Enterprise CEOs. Many professional segments continue to be male-dominated, and there is still a lingering air of male reluctance to see or accept women in the professions, which has stood in the way of further progress.

Many professional women have adopted the Western way of dressing in loose trousers and shirts. Some

women continue wearing their traditional dress of a loose, long coat over loose pants, and a scarf-like headgear. When employed mothers go to work, they often leave children under the care of family members. Many working mothers try to have a job or enterprise near home so child care is easier. Hard-to-get jobs are sometimes turned down when other family members are not available to take care of the children. State-run child care services are slowly emerging in both urban and rural areas.

Women as Business Owners

Promotion of education and training programs for Algerian women has spawned many women entrepreneurs. These women have helped to generate employment opportunities for other women as well. In fact, women account for about 48% of the employees in women-owned enterprises. Typical women-owned enterprises include wholesale and retail marketers of fruit, grains, woven carpets and rugs, jewelry, cosmetics, and traditional handicrafts.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Algeria is a male-dominated Islamic country, so foreign businesswomen should be discreet and circumspect in their dealings with local businessmen, who will be cordial but formal. A pleasant and intelligent manner with deference to the Algerian male ego goes a long way when trying to win their confidence.

Local businesswomen are generally more friendly and receptive than the men. Business engagements may often get interrupted because of calls or intrusion by special guests, so be patient. A formal but conservative Western outfit is ideal for foreign businesswomen for both official and informal engagements. The month of Ramadan is best avoided for official appointments.

Angola

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The heavy casualties among young men during the Angolan civil war gave rise to an unusual demographic profile – a survey conducted by UNICEF revealed that there are only 91 men for every 100 women in Angola. While this opens up new leadership and employment opportunities for women in the long-term, it has also created a large number of households headed solely by women who are faced with the heavy burden of making ends meet, caring for children, and managing the home.

Traditionally, Angola has been a patriarchal society, although among the nine major ethno-linguistic groups, a few practice matrilineal customs. Christian missionaries focused women's education on home economics, nursing and teaching; and, even today, NGOs limit women's training to sewing, embroidery, and cooking. Both UNITA and MPLA – Angola's former civil war antagonists – have consigned women to traditional gender roles, with little representation in leadership, despite their ideological rhetoric.

Bantu women reportedly occupy a high place of honor in society because of their child-bearing abilities. Some tribes in Angola are headed by female chieftains—a compelling testimony to their struggles and achievement. Women hold senior positions in the military (primarily in the medical field) and civil service. The presence of a few women at the ministerial level (fisheries and petroleum) owes more to the existence of a small circle of family-based elite than any significant improvement in women's status.

After the ceasefire in 2002, women have increasingly taken on more non-traditional roles, and the government is working with many international organizations to eradicate illiteracy, which is seen as a barrier to the improvement of women's status. In rural Angola, women generally work as agricultural laborers and, because of their significant part in food production, they are considered equal to men.

Legal Rights

The Constitution grants equal rights to all citizens, and women have the same civil rights as men – to take part in public life, to vote, and to stand for election. But the government does not have the ability to enforce these laws effectively, and societal discrimination against women remains a problem, particularly in rural areas. In addition, the Civil Code includes discriminatory rulings against women in the areas of property disposal, inheritance, and commercial activities. National conferences on women's rights have tried to prevail on the government to amend the Civil Code to end these legal inequalities.

Despite constitutional protection women rarely receive equal pay, and they occupy low-level positions in state-run industries and the private sector.

Women also have legal rights to property, divorce and child custody, but in the absence of any effective means to enforce child support laws, many women are left to fend for themselves.

There are no specific laws that protect women against sexual crimes. The laws are also lenient in sentencing men for domestic crimes. The traditional view is that the husband has every right to punish an "errant" wife.

Education

Angola's adult literacy rate stands at 72.8 percent for men and 50.4 percent for women. The educational enrollment rates for women decrease steadily through primary, secondary, post-secondary, and university levels. The low level of education for girls in Angola is an acute problem that leads to decreased opportunities. As a result, women are concentrated in poor quality jobs that bring low remuneration.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Men and women are generally free to choose their life partners in Angola, although certain tribes follow a traditional custom of arranged marriages. During the civil war, the UNITA combatants forced women and girls to serve as porters, cooks, caretakers, and later on, to marry soldiers. Today, although women are free to choose their partners, the poor economic conditions make it difficult to have a Western-style dating culture, except among the elite class. Though the legal age for marriage is 18 years for both sexes, under the Family Code they can be married at an earlier age (16 for boys and 15 for girls) with parental consent.

Adult women have the legal right to open bank accounts, accept employment, and own property. Widows are naturally entitled to 50 percent of their estate. Although polygamy is illegal under government and Catholic Church laws, an unofficial kind of polygamy has become pervasive in the Angolan culture at all economic levels. Women have little standing in the family, and if a common law wife's performance does not satisfy the husband, he may choose to take another wife. The wives live separately from each other in their own houses.

Angola ranks third in the world in terms of fertility (with an average of 6.88 children born per woman), and infertility is a social stigma. The rights of widows and divorced women are somewhat protected under Angola's progressive laws – provided the marriage has legal sanction. Under traditional law – which is now most widely applied in Angola – a widow has to plead with the husband's family for a share of the property. Since many marriages are not legally sanctioned, the affected women have no legal right to claim financial support from the fathers of their children.

Health

A lack of awareness and heavy domestic responsibility prevent many women from pursuing medical assistance. Women who do go to medical clinics often wait in long queues for an entire day while the clinic processes their papers. Abortion is illegal and a punishable offence in

Angola, but an exception is made in emergencies where the life of the mother is in danger.

An estimate by The United Nations Children's Fund shows that 17 women for every 1,000 live births die from pregnancy-related causes in Angola. A strong belief in traditional medicine where babies are delivered at home contributes to this figure. Pregnant women often lack basic antenatal care that includes counseling on AIDS, nutrition, hygiene, and the prevention of malaria—a chief contributor to both maternal and infant mortality. All of these factors contribute to the fact that the life expectancy of Angolan women is among the lowest in the world.

Interesting Social Customs

Birth, baptism, marriage, and funeral ceremonies are all marked by Christian ceremonies. The locals celebrate a birth with champagne and gifts. At a funeral, friends and relatives join the family of the deceased for a meal after the burial. A widow is expected to wear black for a month and stay inside for a week after the funeral.

Women in Business

General View

Angolan women, like women in most other African countries, have been traditionally employed in agriculture, working in the fields and transporting agricultural products, livestock, and dairy products to open markets. The long period of civil war (1975-2002) found many women heading households with responsibility for extended families of two or even three generations, often without a steady source of income. After the war, Angolan women were more able to educate themselves, and the new government's community health service centers, primary and secondary schools, and post offices created employment opportunities for them as teachers, clerks, and healthcare providers. Today, Angolan women are working in government agencies (at all levels, including leadership positions), banks, schools, the media, and the military.

Legal Rights

Although Angolan women are granted equal status and rights with men under the law, converting these rights into actual practice has not been easy. They have had the right to vote since independence but only recently have rural Angolan women started exercising this franchise. In many regions, male Angolans have refused to comply with laws giving women the right to inherit their husband's property. There is also great disparity in wages for the same job among male and female workers, especially in the unskilled labor sector.

Women in Professions

Angolan women have traditionally worked in agriculture, carpentry, and masonry. They have successfully run micro enterprises, chiefly in the fields of agricultural and dairy products. These small-scale businesses have been a kind of springboard for many women to launch many productive and rewarding businesses.

There are few women heads of companies in Angola. In Parliament, 16% of the deputies are women. Well-known Angolan women achievers include: Suzannete Nunes da Costa, professor of geology; Albina Assis Africano, a

chemist and government minister; Ana Maria de Oliveira, government minister; and, Ana Clara Guerra Marques, choreographer and company director. Today, these women are role models for many aspiring young Angolan women.

Companies and institutions have generally allowed women to wear dresses of their choice. However, many companies have recently started implementing uniform dress codes, keeping traditional values in mind.

With more women entering the workforce, grandparents, relatives, or an older female sibling look after children. State-run childcare centers and play schools are beginning to emerge in various parts of Angola. Many Christian welfare associations also have childcare units.

Women as Business Owners

The few flourishing Angolan women entrepreneurs have succeeded in generating employment for many of their female compatriots. Their experience, gathered over the years working in the agricultural field, has enabled many women to set up small-scale business units in the agricultural produce sector. Successful women-owned small- and medium-scale enterprises include manufacturers of pottery, traditional handicrafts, garments, and herbal products.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The Angolan people are generally pleasant and friendly toward visiting businesswomen, who are welcomed with great deal of warmth and cordiality. The businesswomen of Angola, in particular, are extremely helpful and kind to their visiting counterparts. Many Angolans will display curiosity about their guests and ask questions about their guest's family and children. Foreign businesswomen are advised to take along an interpreter since Portuguese and Bantu are the main languages, and very few people speak fluent English.

Official engagements are usually prearranged, and meetings are conducted with precision, so visiting businesswomen should come well prepared. Address ministers and senior heads of government with the title, "Your Excellency." Formal suits or casual Western outfits are generally the dress of choice for women visiting Angola on business. Do not talk business during tea or lunch breaks.

Argentina

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In Argentina, the Latin *machismo* is represented by the rugged *gaucho* (a cowboy of the South American *pampas*), an image of strength that is firmly ingrained in the Argentine psyche. Women generally have a lower status than men in the economic, family, social, cultural, and sexual arena. Traditionally, the position of women in Argentina was based on Spanish law, wherein women were considered the property of men (their husband or father). Under the colonial system, women could not inherit land. This changed after independence from Spain, and inheritance laws became more impartial, but still families found ways to bequeath the bulk of the estates to male heirs as this helped to continue the strong lineage of patrimony.

Women have a disproportionately large responsibility in the family, in the community, and in the economy. The percentage of Argentine households headed by women has grown steadily over the past decade. Argentine women often found it difficult to take on decision-making roles or executive positions in business and, out of a desperate need to support their families, many women with professional educations and qualifications resigned themselves to low-paying positions. This situation has been gradually changing, and women have now begun to enter the formal workforce in larger numbers.

The women's movement in Argentina fought and won the "quota law," which decrees that political parties must have at least 30 percent women as candidates for seats they were likely to win. Unfortunately, however, Argentine women are often victims of violence and discrimination despite recent efforts to reduce abuses against them. Native women and women belonging to minority ethnic groups particularly suffer from discrimination in employment.

Legal Rights

The Argentine constitution guarantees equal legal rights for men and women and granted suffrage to women in 1947. Women also have the right to drive vehicles and to own, manage, transfer, and inherit property – except in the case of joint property, in which case the law requires the consent of both owners.

Abortion is illegal in Argentina except when performed to save the woman's life or health, or when performed to terminate a pregnancy resulting from rape. However, high maternal mortality rates in Argentina reveal the widespread practice of illegal abortion, which in turn arises from a lack of awareness and access to contraceptives. Men traditionally have had special authority over children (*patria potestas*) in Argentine law. Recent legislation, though, allows parents to share authority over their children. Women can initiate divorce under the civil law either separately or through a joint petition.

Education

The government has developed the National Program for Equal Opportunities for Women in the Education Sector, and a women's section has been formed in the Ministry of Education to guarantee gender equality in all areas of the educational system. A survey in 2003 showed that both men and women in Argentina have the same access to education and that they have the same literacy rate of over 98 percent. Men and women share the same classroom space in Argentinian schools.

Although women generally achieve higher grades than their male peers, they face more difficulties in finding a job than men. Men hold 95 percent of the top managerial positions and reach higher levels of the hierarchy much faster than women. Generally, women receive lower wages than their male counterparts for the same work, and the most highly educated women are also those who suffer the highest level of wage discrimination. For instance, the average salary of a female professional scientist is 43 percent lower than that for a male, and for skilled technicians, women's salaries are 47 percent lower than men's.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Women have the freedom to marry any one they choose, and only minors below 18 years of age require consent of a parent or judge. Argentinean culture allows girls to start dating when they are about 15. Dating is common, and people have an easy Latin attitude toward intimacy. Men and women meet through family, work, and group activities, and serious relationships develop slowly over several years. Most couples marry in their mid-twenties. Married women are free to take their husbands' last name, but a national law requires the use of "de" before the husband's last name. Polygamy is illegal in Argentina.

Traditionally, women were in charge of the household and took care of cooking, cleaning, and childcare. In Argentina, the husband reserves the rights to manage assets whose origin cannot be determined. Women have the right to manage and dispose of their property and earnings.

Childlessness is not a stigma in Argentina. In a divorce, mothers get custody of children who are under 5 years old, except in cases when it would be detrimental to the interests of the child. Where the parents fail to arrive at a consensus, custody is granted to the parent whom the judge considers most suitable. The non-custodial parent has the right to maintain sufficient contact and supervise the child's education.

Health

Argentina has stringent laws against abortion and modern birth control methods, and it went so far as to prohibit the sale of all contraceptives for several decades in the late twentieth century—an extreme display of opposition to birth control, even by religious standards. Women in the middle and upper classes have access to health and family planning services through private doctors and clinics, while rural women are dependent upon state

clinics that lack in even the most basic services. There is pressure on the government to help women to access a wider range of health care services through the more numerous primary healthcare centers rather than through hospitals. A promising national law on reproductive health notwithstanding, doctors and spouses continue to exercise control over women's reproductive health through laws and traditions. As a result, many women are forced to choose between an unwanted/dangerous pregnancy and an illegal/unsafe abortion that may harm their lives.

Women in Business

General View

During their turbulent history, Argentine women have had to contend with numerous factors that retarded their progress, not the least of which was the "machismo" attitude that relegated their status to child-bearer and homemaker. The rise of Eva Peron, the restoration of democracy, and other factors have, however, contributed to the steady progress of women in business. Women have blazed a trail through many a male bastion to the extent that Argentine businesswomen are now considered equal in status to their North American counterparts.

Today, women are found in all sectors of the economy: agriculture, industry, services, science, education, and information technology.

Legal Rights

Argentina's constitution grants equal rights to women (the right to property and inheritance; equality of opportunity and pay), although many uneducated women were totally unaware of their fundamental rights until recently. Wage disparities remain between men and women, and a woman's income is, on average, 64% of a man's, and even less in the unorganized labor sector.

Women in Professions

Traditionally Argentine women worked in agriculture. They gradually began entering the fields of teaching and primary healthcare services, which needed no specialized skills at the time. Several programs that carried out to educate women socially, economically, and politically have had a major impact, and today, the percentage of women with a university degree is higher than men at 7.2%. Argentina can also now boast of many women heading companies in diverse fields. Topping the list are Alejandra Nicoli, director of international operations for Tec Petrol (recently honored as the top woman executive in the global energy sector) and Susana Malcorra, entrepreneur and former CEO of Telecom Argentina.

Despite the high literacy rate and educational achievement of Argentine women, they do not necessarily get easy access to jobs corresponding to their professional expertise.

While urban women in Argentina wear European style clothing at work and are known for being very stylish, in rural areas women can still be found wearing their traditional dress of a loose pair of trousers, poncho, and wide-brimmed hat.

Working women are also responsible for the care of their children, especially women from lower income groups; so,

it is not uncommon for them to have a relative, older sibling, or neighbor to help take care of their children. Those who can afford it engage nannies or babysitters, many of whom are college or senior school students working for pocket money. State-run and private childcare facilities exist in Argentina, and NGOs are also establishing childcare centers to meet the increasing need for childcare providers.

Women as Business Owners

Despite the fact that credit from banks can often prove difficult to obtain for women starting their own enterprises, many talented women have chosen to pursue careers as entrepreneurs. Argentine women own businesses in the fields of retail trade manufacturing, personal services, apparel manufacturing, floraculture, and tourism.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen can expect a cordial and polite reception by local businesspeople. A peck on the cheek or a pat on the shoulder are considered expressions of friendliness and not sexual harassment. Pride in their country's achievements is often reflected in their conversation, which should be graciously recognized. Argentineans believe in establishing a level of mutual trust and respect before launching into business pacts. Expect to be kept waiting for an appointment, especially with a senior bureaucrat. A formal European style dress and well-groomed appearance will give a positive and pleasant impression. When invited to dinner with the host's family, do not offer to "stir the pot or turn the roast," as Argentinean hosts strictly believe that to be the job of an expert.

Armenia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The condition of Armenian women has improved over the years, especially since the demise of the Soviet Union. During the upheavals that culminated in Armenia's political independence, Armenian women performed the role of supporting their family and promoting their national culture and traditions. They also established schools and orphanages.

Armenian society has traditionally been patriarchal, but awareness regarding gender equality has increased among the people. Today, women not only manage the household but also occupy responsible positions professionally. Armenian law promotes gender equality and freedom, and all forms of discrimination against women were prohibited in 1997. In spite of these steps, many Armenian women are subjected to the indignities of child marriages, rape, and domestic violence. Women frequently fail to take legal action against these abuses because of public opinion, financial dependence, or ignorance of the laws.

In 2005, women held about 5.3 percent of the total seats in the lower house of parliament, and 46 percent of the teachers in state universities were women. Women comprised about one-fourth of all judges and one-third of defense attorneys. Some women also hold top positions in the banking and business sector. Rural women are mostly engaged in agriculture, middle-level teaching, or in health care services. There are no dress code restrictions for working women in Armenia.

Legal Rights

The constitution of Armenia grants equal rights to all people under the law. Women have the right to vote, and the right to education, health care, employment, and most other democratic rights. However, these rights are not fully enforced in practice, as Armenia does not have a public agency to deal with gender issues in particular. In 1990, the first woman was elected to parliament. Article 28 of the Armenian constitution states that everyone has equal right to property and inheritance, irrespective of the gender. Women can legally own any kind of property in Armenia; however, it is common in Armenian society for sons to inherit most of the ancestral property.

In Armenia, abortion is legally permitted. Although Article 32 of Armenian law permits divorce, Armenian women have to contend with the traditional stigma attached to it. Upon divorce, women are generally granted custody of the children while the father pays the alimony.

Education

Article 35 of the constitution of Armenia guarantees every citizen equal rights to education. The state provides education up to the secondary level free of cost. Women enjoy equal rights at all levels of education. The literacy rate among women in Armenia is very high – 99.2 percent, versus 99.7 percent for men. About 85 percent of women in Armenia enroll in secondary level schools.

Armenian education is co-educational with both boys and girls sharing the same class.

Article 83 of the Labor code prohibits discrimination in pay based on gender. This code is implemented in the public sector but not always in the private sector.

Dating, Marriage and Family

In Armenia, both men and women are free to choose their partners and marry. However, in many families, the tradition of marriages being arranged by the relatives still exists. Armenian parents permit their daughters dating of their daughters if they feel the boy is from a good family and is serious about marriage. Women generally begin to date when they are about 16 to 18 years of age. Women meet men at proms, youth activities, social events, on-line dating agencies, schools, and universities. In Armenia, the legal age of marriage is 17 years for women and 18 years for men. Armenian law allows women to either keep their family name after marriage or to take their husband's name, the latter being the common practice.

Armenian women combine both professional and family roles in their lives. Children are highly valued in Armenian culture, and women hold the primary responsibility for their well being until they reach puberty. Upon divorce, the mother is usually granted custody of the children by the courts, and the father has to pay alimony. Women are allowed to own property separate from their husbands. The law states that the property that belonged to either spouse before marriage, and the property obtained during marriage as gifts or by way of inheritance, remains the property of that spouse.

Health

The government has provided several institutions to provide health services specifically for women, and the government also provides free medical services to pregnant women, including their delivery. However, these services are mostly available in cities, and rural women have to incur additional expenses to travel to the cities to obtain such services. Abortion among rural women has increased considerably due to the non-availability and inaccessibility of proper family-planning facilities in their villages. The use of contraceptives as a way of family planning is slowly becoming more popular in Armenia. According to a survey in 1997 about 82 percent of women in Armenia used contraceptives.

Women in Business

General View

The patriarchal society in Armenia does not generally approve of women participating in economic activities outside of the household, which is considered their domain. Men do not share in household chores or childcare. Legislation has been introduced to reduce gender inequality, but women have gained little as a consequence. Though women dominate the NGO community in Armenia, they seldom assume leadership roles, even in the human rights' movement.

Legal Rights

Even though gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution of Armenia, many government officials still talk in terms of the 'natural roles' of women. According to Article 28 of the Constitution, women can legally own and inherit any kind of property. Family and marriage codes guarantee equal rights of spouses to jointly owned property.

The law also assures gender equality in matters of employment and pay, but the reality on the ground is different. In 2004, women earned, on average, 40 percent less than men. Armenian society also does not provide women the same professional opportunities as men, and they are usually consigned to menial or low-skilled jobs.

Women in Professions

While approximately 45 percent of Armenian women participate in the work force, women constitute 66 percent of the unemployed, although this is partly due to the fact that employers often give women short-term contracts or part-time jobs to evade maternity leave and childcare payments. Women generally find employment in the education and health sectors, in the travel industry, or as domestic workers, subsistence farmers, or factory workers (over 40 percent of working women are employed in industry).

There are very few female heads of companies in Armenia. Two prominent women at the senior management level – a director of a textile factory and the president of the pharmacy association – have been holding these positions since Soviet times. Women hold two important positions at the Central Bank of Armenia, but women are not represented at the top management levels of the commercial banking sector.

Armenian women are, however, well represented in the media. Golos Armenii and Chorrord Ishkhanutyun run national newspapers, women head the National Press Club and the National Association of Journalists, and over 40 percent of media professionals are female.

There is no legal bar on women entering any profession, but traditional attitudes deter many of them from entering male-dominated professions. Women are exempt from military service in Armenia.

There are no dress codes for women in the workplace. Women generally wear Western style clothing, and they avoid short skirts and shorts.

The state has established daycare centers for children from 2 to 3 years old, kindergartens for children aged from 3 to 6, and combinations of the two. There are also a few community-based day care centers that mostly employ women. Despite the availability of infant daycare centers, many Armenian women prefer to leave their children with grandmothers or other close relatives.

Women as Business Owners

Armenian women participate as owners of businesses of all sizes. Martirosyan Naira has emerged as the head of Doghagorts, a joint stock company. Rosa Tsarukyan owns and directs her family business of mushroom production, Tsarukyan GK Ltd. (Kotayk), which is a medium-sized enterprise. Gohar Yenokyan, former deputy of the Supreme Council of the USSR, leads Garun, a large enterprise in Yerevan.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Visiting businesswomen are likely to encounter a combination of oriental traditions and relics of Soviet-style work ethic. They should be aware that their discussions and negotiations are likely to be accompanied by much wining and dining, exchanging of gifts, and visits to homes and historic sites.

Foreign businesswomen can also expect delays in the replies to their inquiries, letters, and faxes: means of international communication are unreliable and expensive for many Armenians.

Visitors to Armenia are advised to carry cash with them, as credit cards and travelers checks are accepted at only a few places. Corruption is widely prevalent in most government departments, like the police and customs. When foreign businesswomen face delays or harassment due to corruption, they should get in touch with their embassy.

Australia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

While Australian society has historically been paternal, driven by the masculine ideal of loyal fraternity or “mateship,” Australian women have been at the forefront of the push for gender equality and have made much progress, both socially and economically.

Australian women won the right to vote in federal elections in 1901. The Country Women’s Association, representing the concerns of rural Australian women, came into being in 1922 and is still a powerful force in the country. The first woman was elected to the Australian parliament in 1943.

That said, growth in educational and employment opportunities didn’t really start in earnest until the 1970s. Women have traditionally been associated with the “gentle” professions like teaching and nursing and still predominantly find employment in administrative and clerical jobs. Increasingly, however, Australian women are making substantial in-roads into technology, scientific, and medical professions and are occupying more leadership and managerial positions in the corporate and public sectors (although they are still greatly underrepresented in managerial and leadership positions).

Recent government initiatives have made working-from-home, job sharing, permanent part-time work, and flexible working hours easier for women, which has helped Australian women to successfully fulfill their commitments to both work and home.

Legal Rights

Australian women enjoy equal status to men under the law. The percentage of women in government at the ministerial level is negligible, but women hold 24.7 percent of the seats in the lower house of Parliament and 35.5 percent of seats in the upper house.

Women also have full reproductive rights and the right to make decisions about family planning. They can also own/sell/buy property, initiate divorce and get custody of children upon divorce. Women in Australia initiate over 60 percent of all divorces.

Education

Australia has 100 percent literacy for both men and women. The government provides funded, compulsory primary and secondary education for all children between the ages of 6 and 15. In 2001, the percentage of women who completed their higher education was 17 percent for women in general and 25 percent for women aged 25 to 29 years—the latter being a higher rate than that for men. Men and women share the same classrooms. Educated women have the same job opportunities as men in most sectors, although inequalities in wages for men and women for doing the same kinds of job still remain.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Women are free to date men and select their own partners apart from certain minority ethnic communities where arranged marriages are the norm. The usual age for dating is between 16 to 18 years. Women generally meet men in educational, social, and recreational settings. Australian women typically marry in their very late 20’s (the average bride being 29 years old in 2002, up from 24 years old in 1982), although the age is higher for educated urban women. Women generally take their husband’s name after marriage.

Australian men generally help their women with household chores, especially if both partners are working full-time, but maintaining the house still remains the woman’s primary responsibility. There is no social stigma attached to women who have no children.

Divorce is relatively common, with an occurrence rate of 40 percent in first marriages. Divorce usually succeeds a one-year separation period. Divorced parents share mutual property and child-rearing duties, with some help from the court or mediators. Both parents have the responsibility of making proper arrangements for the children after divorce. The government also provides financial support for single, divorced women with dependent children under the child support scheme.

Divorce and remarriage do not carry any social stigmas. The number of live-in relationships before marriage has increased substantially over the years. Polygamy is not allowed under Australian law, and such actions can result in imprisonment.

Health

Healthcare standards are reasonably high in urban Australia, but women in rural Australia are not so fortunate. Some important services like obstetrics are considered to be at a “third world” level in remote regions of the vast outback. Australian society is fairly progressive regarding a women’s right of access to abortion and other family planning methods, with women having the right to make their own healthcare decisions in most parts of the country. In some areas, however, local law gives their doctors complete control over decisions relating to termination of pregnancy.

Interesting Social Customs

The beach culture of much of Australia has led to a very casual dress code in both social and work settings, where suits are becoming increasingly rare. Women are even less bound to formal dress codes than their male counterparts.

Women in Business

General View

More than 70 percent of Australian women work outside the home, with many of them involved in running small businesses. However, of the entire full-time Australian workforce, less than a third are female and 45 percent of working Australian women work part-time. These workforce participation levels are primarily due to the degree to which women are responsible for taking care of their families. For example, only 41 percent of women above the age of 55 work, due, in great part, to the fact that so many are involved in the care of an elderly parent.

Australian businesswomen generally run small businesses (33 percent of all small businesses in Australia are female-owned) and tend to view their businesses as an income-generating source, rather than as a hobby or job alternative. Women-run businesses are found in all regions of the country and significantly contribute to the local economies by providing jobs and income.

Legal Rights

Australian women enjoy the same legal rights as men in every aspect of society, including voting rights and the right to own and inherit property. In fact, Australia was one of the first countries in the world to give women the right to vote back in 1901.

Australia ranks second in the list of developed countries in a survey conducted of gender pay ratios, with Australian women making 91 cents to a man's dollar, although this applied only to non-managerial, full-time workers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998-2000).

Women in Professions

While gender segregation is not as widespread in Australian society as it is in other societies, there are still many jobs like teaching and nursing that are still considered the exclusive reserve of females. The number of Australian women in executive management positions (executive managers, board directors) at large companies has risen considerably. The number of companies with more than one woman in an executive managerial position is also increasing.

One of Australia's most famous businesswomen is Gina Rinehart, who made her fortune in iron ore. She was already the richest woman in Australia, but has since joined the billionaire's club and is also ranked among the top 10 richest Australians. Helen Jarman achieved fame by venturing into the male-dominated field of transport and logistics with tremendous success. She was primarily responsible for building Infoactiv Logistics Solutions into a multi-million dollar company. Annette Sym started out with a home-based business that had an ironing board for a desk and no money. In the span of a few years, she has managed to build a multi-million dollar cookbook business.

The only jobs that Australian women are barred from are in the airfield defense units of the Royal Australian Air Force. No dress code restrictions prevent Australian women from taking up certain jobs. Australian women follow the fashion styles prevalent in Europe and North America, with most women wearing business suits, skirts, blouses, or other dresses to work.

State-sponsored childcare is available for all children in Australia. In the event of the female head of the family working after childbirth, the grandparents of the child still often assume childcare. However, many Australian women prefer to resign their jobs or take on part-time jobs after childbirth. Research also shows that balancing work and childcare is getting harder for most women. This has to do with the fact that employers are reluctant to provide mothers with benefits such as flexible working hours, increases in family-related leave provisions, and long-term casual leave.

Women as Business Owners

There are many women in all geographical regions of Australia, urban as well as rural, who own businesses, and the trend of women owning businesses has been rising sharply and looks set for continued growth. Women can raise capital from various sources and perform other business-related tasks with the same ease as men. Businesswomen are also eligible for a wide variety of small business loans. Home-based businesses are increasingly popular with women because they help contribute to the household income and allow them to spend more time with their families. The most common of these are service businesses such as daycare, clerical services, and real estate. According to government figures, home-based businesses have contributed billions of dollars to the Australian economy and have, in turn, led to the flourishing of related sectors like office supplies.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Australia follows the various social, cultural, and business customs followed in Europe, and businesspeople are very comfortable doing business with women. Australians value friendly personal relationships, and this applies to the business world as well. Australians like to get down to business quickly, so punctuality is a must; negotiations proceed quickly with minimal bargaining, and communications are generally straightforward and direct, although often with a dose of humor thrown in. One is expected to take teasing good-humoredly and even reply in kind, since it shows a degree of self-confidence that Australians respect. Australians are very proud of their country, so bragging about one's home country or criticizing anything Australian is inadvisable. Discussions about Australia's aboriginal population can also get touchy and should be avoided.

Austria

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Austrian society is fairly conservative in terms of gender roles. Traditional attitudes persist, to some degree, to this day with Austrian women holding jobs outside the home in lower numbers than women in most other European countries. Furthermore, many Austrian men still consider the great majority of housework and child-care to be "women's work" regardless of whether. Recently legislation against gender discrimination and changing attitudes toward the role of women in society have moved Austria toward more European norms on women's issues.

Except for those with college degrees, women are under-represented in business and the professions (especially medicine) and generally hold jobs that require less education and fewer skills. Most women are still paid less than men for doing the same type of job. Austrian women are, however, relatively well-represented in politics with 59 women in the 183-seat National Council, 18 women in the 62-member Federal Council, and 6 women in the 12-member cabinet. Women also represent about one-third of the posts in the judicial sector

There are no dress code restrictions in Austria.

Legal Rights

Austrian women have the same legal rights, status, and opportunities as men. Austria allowed women to vote in 1918 and the Equal Treatment Law of 1979 protected women against various forms of discrimination. Amended several times, the law aims to establish equal rights for women, especially in the workplace. It has affirmed and set up commissions for the mediation of complaints and violations regarding pay, sexual discrimination, harassment, and promotion. The law also aims to increase employment of women in government agencies and to provide compensation to women for unpaid household work, single parenting, and the dual burden of employment and child care.

Austrian women have the right to hold separate assets from their husband and to inherit property. Abortion is permitted up to the third month of pregnancy if it is performed by a qualified doctor after proper counseling and it also Austrian women have the right to initiate divorce, either independently or jointly, if the marriage has irretrievably broken down.

Education

Austria boasts of one of the best education systems of the world with a literacy rate of 99 percent. All children have equal right to free education and they have easy access to higher education, since the 1960s annual enrollment at universities has increased about ten-fold, with women accounting for about half of the enrolments.

Schooling is compulsory through the ninth grade and required both in public schools and schools run by the Roman Catholic Church in Austria

Equal expertise/qualification between women and men does not guarantee equal participation or advancement in professions although progress has been made since the 1980s when only 16 percent of women with advanced degrees were in leading positions in the private sector or in the civil service. According to a 2001 government survey 8% were less in the civil service and 8% higher in at around 40% (for both and white-jobs)

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Austrian women are free to choose their boyfriends and husbands. with women, modern Austrian women asking them to Austrian girls begin to date at the age of 13 or 14. Women meet men in social, professional, and recreational settings. Men and women who are well-routinely arrange casual meetings and generally Austrian women attain the legal age of consent for marriage at the age of 16, but, in individual cases, the court may allow a girl to marry at the age of 15. Today, young people live together and raise children without marrying, and more women opt for single-parenthood.

Although modern Austrians consider marriage more of an equal than their predecessors, a survey carried out at the end of the 1980s revealed that almost 80 percent of married women were solely responsible for household tasks (like laundry, cooking, and cleaning) and some of these attitudes still persist.

After marriage, both spouses can add either the surname of their spouse to their names or the wife can add her to her husband's name. Children of unmarried women take the maiden name of their mothers. In Austria there is no stigma attached to being childless. In the event of divorce, parents retain the right to have joint custody of a minor child, after submitting an agreement to the courts. In the absence of such an agreement, the court reserves the right to decide which parent should have sole custody.

Health

Women and men have equal access to medical care and are permitted to make their own healthcare decisions. Austria has a well-organized healthcare system with 99 percent of its people covered under health insurance plans. In Vienna, women can choose to give birth in a public or private hospital, a birthing home, or in their own home.

Austrian women are well-informed about contraception via a network of family and partnership counseling centers that advise women about pregnancy and provide information on birth control methods. The Austrian abortion rate is one of the lowest in the world.

Interesting Social Customs

Austrians consider it unlucky for a woman to marry a man whose surname began with the same letter as hers, hence the saying "To change the name and not the letter is to change the worst and not the better."

Women in Business

General View

Austrian women hold jobs outside the home less frequently than do women in most other Western European countries. Women are under-represented in business and the professions and generally hold jobs that require less education and fewer skills. The law requires the government to hire at least 40 percent of women in the civil services, including the police force. However, it does not penalize agencies that fail to attain the 40 percent target.

Despite various legislation passed by the Austrian government against gender discrimination, traditional role models prevail and most women are still paid less than men for doing similar type of jobs. Many Austrian men still consider household work and childcare to be women's work. Businesses incorporated by women make up only 25 percent of the total businesses in Austria. The balance between family and business life is a big challenge for Austrian women employees and entrepreneurs.

Legal Rights

Legally, Austrian women have the same rights, status, and opportunities as men. They won the right to vote in 1918. Women also have the right to incorporate their own business, hold assets, and inherit property. Since joining the European Union, many legal impediments affecting women have been removed.

Austrian women earn only 67 percent of what men earn for a similar type of work, despite the fact that they now make up 60 percent of the work force. Self-employed women make just half the income of men. According to an E.U. survey, self-employed women's earnings were highest in the health sector and the lowest in the entertainment, sport, arts, teaching, and research sectors. Among small business entrepreneurs, highest incomes were found in the construction sector, and the lowest earnings in the hotel and catering sector. Recently, a Federal Equality Commission was constituted to award compensation to women who are victims of gender discrimination.

Women in Professions

The traditional occupations of Austrian women are in wholesale and retail trading, teaching, health and social services, manufacturing, and the hospitality industry. Self-employed women occupy the areas of personal services, trade and crafts, education and culture, and healthcare.

According to a survey in 2000, 5.4 percent of the total women employed held managerial positions. However, Austria has many female heads of companies and around 30 percent of Austrian companies are led by women, and 37 percent of the 300 new enterprises that were incorporated in 2003 were led by women.

Before 2000, Austrian women were barred from joining the armed forces and working in most night jobs (except as nurses or taxi drivers). Since joining the European Union, Austria had to fall in line with the E.U. laws regarding gender equality, and Austrian women can now work in any profession. There are also no dress code restrictions for women.

The federal government in Austria has introduced a childcare allowance as a family benefit. Starting in 2002, every

mother or father receives US\$400 a month as childcare allowance whether or not they were previously employed. Parents have the liberty to choose from a range of public and private childcare facilities, including kindergartens, children's groups, and day care centers.

Women as Business Owners

Most female entrepreneurs in Austria are sole proprietors and own businesses in agriculture or forestry sectors.

Prominent Austrian businesswomen include Tina Reisenbichler, member of the executive board at telecom giant T-Systems Austria; Elisabeth Gürtler-Mauthner, managing director of the *Hotel Sacher* in Vienna; Susanne Lanzerstorfer, general manager and owner of APAC GmbH; Ulrike Rabmer-Koller, managing partner of Rabmer Bau Gruppe; and Angelika Winzig, owner of Powder Tech.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Austrians accord a warm and friendly welcome to visiting businesswomen. Austrians rarely indulge in jesting or small talk and may be direct to the point of apparent brusqueness. They are also generally suspicious of overstatements.

Appearance and clothes are very important to Austrians, who manage to appear neat and conservative even in informal attire. Major cultural venues and high-end restaurants have a strict dress code and will refuse admittance if patrons do not follow the same. All attire, from scarves to shoes, should be well polished and pressed.

Austrians restrict the use of first names to close friends and colleagues, so avoid addressing your business partner with his first name until you have the explicit permission to do so. Always use the formal word *Sie* for 'you', unless you have their permission to use the informal "*du*." Titles are esteemed in Austrian culture and may be in the form of a university degree or an honored position at a firm or in government. Use these honorific titles consistently in all forms of oral and written communications.

Azerbaijan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Despite decades of Soviet socialist “re-education” of the Azerbaijanis, they remain a traditional people. Men dominate society, and women are expected to be homemakers and, in many cases, bread winners, too. Even though more than 90 percent of Azerbaijanis are Muslims, most people are non-religious, and religion doesn't influence the daily life of the people to any great extent.

The patriarchal society of Azerbaijan gives extreme importance to the family. Historically, the *hoj* (clan) of up to 40 members was the typical societal unit in the rural areas. Although the nuclear family is the norm these days, men still rule the roost. Gender discrimination against women is sometimes so flagrant that in case of financial instability, boys get educational preference and girls are pressured into early marriages. If the bride or groom is below legal age, marriages are not officially registered. This practice creates health problems for girls and a lack of protection for them in case of legal complications.

Most foreign and private firms usually hire women below 30 years of age in a form of discrimination against older women. Women have minimal representation in the government at the ministerial level and hold only 10.5 percent of seats in the lower house or government.

In cities, couples generally live with the man's parents or the woman's parents due to economic concerns and housing shortages. The eldest women in the household have great clout in decision-making, although the eldest male is generally the head of the household.

Despite the overwhelming Muslim majority, Azerbaijan is a secular country, and women generally wear casual clothing. Some women have been even prevented from wearing the traditional headscarves by local officials in an interesting example of Azerbaijani secularism.

Legal Rights

Under Azerbaijan laws, women have equal rights and freedoms with men. Women have the right to vote, to drive vehicles, and enjoy an equal right to own and inherit land.

Abortion is not a crime in Azerbaijan, and the official abortion rate is low at around 13 percent for women aged 15 to 44, but many abortions are conducted clandestinely, evidenced by the dearth of contraceptive methods (used by 55% of women) and the unwillingness of many young women to become mothers.

Women have equal rights to divorce under the law, but divorce is traditionally considered a disgraceful affair, and some men and women kill themselves rather than undergo the shame of it. Upon divorce, both parents have equal responsibility in the welfare of their children, but women usually get the custody of children.

Education

According to Article 42 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan, women and men have equal rights to education. Literacy rates measured in 1999 showed almost universal literacy with only a 1 percent advantage for men over women.

The government guarantees free secondary education to all its citizens with co-education for girls and boys. Women face lack of job opportunities in certain sectors of the economy like construction and transportation and, to a lesser extent, in administration and manufacturing. However, women dominate in the arts, in public health services, and in information technology.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Though Western-style dating is not generally practiced in Azerbaijan culture, it has received some acceptance in urban areas. Society expects such dating to end in marriage, and premarital sex is strongly discouraged. In order to get engaged, a man typically sends a formal proposal to the woman's parents through an older relative. The legal age for marriage is 17 for women and 18 for men, but women generally marry at or above the age of 20. Families usually arrange marriages, but only according to the wishes of those to be betrothed. Girls have the right to oppose a person proposed by her parents.

Bigamy and polygamy were illegal under Soviet laws, but those laws have been removed after Azerbaijan gained independence. Cases of bigamy (and even polygamy) are increasing among Azeri migrants, and defenders of the practice claim it falls in line with Islamic laws.

The constitution provides equal rights for men and women to hold property, and women can hold assets separate from their husband. Customarily, men are in charge of the whole household, and women take responsibility for domestic work. The paradox of the stigma attached to women unable to conceive on the one hand, and the many women terminating their pregnancies (because they don't want to have children) on the other, is a surprising feature of Azerbaijani society. Women have equal rights in case of divorce, and both parents share the responsibility for safeguarding their children.

Health

Infant and maternal mortality rates and general reproductive health issues are causing concern in Azerbaijan, due to the high rate of legal and illegal abortions and, particularly, sex-selective abortion. Women can generally make their own healthcare decisions but require the consent of their husbands in certain situations (like abortion).

Interesting Social Customs

Azerbaijanis consider it impolite to openly mention going to the bathroom.

Women in Business

General View

Traditionally, Azerbaijani men continue to be recognized as the family bread winner and the women as the homemaker. Soviet policies helped women get employment outside their home, and these jobs ranged from unskilled labor to managerial posts in the oil industry. Starting during World War II, women began to make further strides in almost all professions, and the number of women with higher education and technical skills also showed a steady rise, despite being a nation with traditional prejudices against working women, attitudes softened over time, and women employees became a major part of the workforce in Azerbaijan, particularly in the oil industry, which offered high wages and social benefits. After independence, many women continued to be employed but more in secretarial and lower-level managerial levels. Many firms are not enthusiastic about offering women senior technical positions and, currently, very few women hold executive positions in companies.

Legal Rights

As per Article 25 of the Azerbaijani Constitution, men and women are guaranteed equal rights and freedoms, including the right to vote. Women and men have equal right to own and inherit land, and the land registry of Azerbaijan has guaranteed this by including women's names in land registration statements. Although Soviet policies had helped women achieve high levels of education and work experience, unemployment and pay discrimination against women are very evident today. For instance, despite the fact that Azerbaijan law specifically specifies non-discrimination in employment and wages for men and women, the ratio of women's wages to men's wages was just 72 percent in education-related careers and 55 percent in health and social careers—and these are the more female-friendly employment sectors!

Women in Professions

During World War II, many women gravitated to the oil industry and effectively filled up vacancies left by men. Women also marketed their traditionally acquired skills in carpet weaving and the manufacture of jewelry, copper products, and silk. Many women converted their skill and knowledge into small-scale businesses and helped establish a network of female entrepreneurs. That said, the representation of women continues to be low in administrative and executive posts, and the number of women leading or owning businesses also remains low. A survey conducted in 2002 showed that 43 percent of the total female labor force was employed in agriculture, and 7 percent was employed in industry. Another survey in 2003 showed a female economic activity rate of 55.2 percent, reflecting a poor representation of women in all major sectors.

Legally, women are not barred from any professions, but cultural and traditional restrictions and overt favoritism of men over women by employers continues to ensure female under-representation in senior and executive business positions.

Despite being a Muslim country, there are no dress code restrictions for working women. Traditional Islamic dress is worn less in Azerbaijan than other Muslim countries, and, today, visitors will see many women in Western-style dress.

State-sponsored childcare centers are still in the planning phase, so working mothers typically use relatives and private institutions for childcare..

Women as Business Owners

Women continue to focus on micro enterprises, since many of them are reluctant to face the risks, expense, and competition involved in small- and medium-scale enterprises. Lack of capital and credit facilities, inadequate business knowledge, and domestic obligations are all impediments to the expansion of women-run businesses. Successful enterprises can be found, however, in carpet-weaving, knitted garment making, and other textile businesses. Some women run primary school and daycare centers as well.

Prominent women entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan include: Agamirzoeva Fatima Eyyubkhan, who runs a medium-sized arts and crafts enterprise; Guseinova Zulfia Seifali Güzü, owner of a medium-sized garment manufacturer; Safarova Sayali Abulfat, owner of a small media firm; and Allazova Maya Allaz, who runs Mars Investment LLC, a small Baku-based brokerage.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Azeri businesspeople treat foreign businesswomen with respect and courtesy, although some of the local businessmen may appear somewhat patronizing. A friendly, yet professional approach is appropriate when dealing with Azeri businesspeople, and any displays of skill and efficiency will help to inspire confidence among them. Since many official documents will be written in Azeri, an elementary knowledge of Azeri or a translator helps to move business matters along smoothly. Business cards, printed both in English and Azeri, are formally exchanged during initial meetings. Business attire is formal in Azerbaijan. Smoking in public, keeping physical space between sexes, and keeping conversations to a minimum during meal times help earn the respect of the local businesspeople. Since Azeris do not openly turn down or reject offers, a positive answer at times may imply the contrary. Azeri people also do not publicly talk about physical conditions pertaining to women, so people will apologize before mentioning 'pregnancy.' Mentioning 'toilets' and 'bathrooms' among adults is also considered improper.

Bahamas

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Bahamian society has traditionally considered women subservient to men. The fight for equal rights started in the 1950s with the women suffrage movement led by the late Dame Dr. Doris Johnson (first and only woman cabinet minister in Bahamian politics). Women won the right to vote in 1961, 12 years before independence from Great Britain. In 2001, Dr. Ivy Dumont was appointed as the first woman governor-general of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

Men dominate higher positions in the public sector and the dominant fishing, transportation, and construction industries. Women have made some inroads into traditional male-dominated businesses but typically own small-scale businesses in fishing and the tourist and hospitality sectors. Women still face a lot of social discrimination in the work place. Generally, urban women have better job opportunities than rural women. Women hold 43 percent of the seats in the Senate and 3 percent of ministerial posts. A woman serves as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court as well. Unfortunately, however, some inequalities still exist. Haitian women immigrants suffer from racial discrimination at the hands of the Bahamian majority.

The role of Bahamian women changed since the 1980s as government policies of the government aimed at empowering women in health, education, and training started being implemented. Recently, well-known women politicians have been promoting an amendment to citizenship laws to allow them to transfer their citizenship to foreign-born spouses and children. Generally, Bahamian women face no dress code restrictions and are comfortable in both casual and formal attire.

Legal Rights

The constitution assures equal rights to men and women in all spheres. Since women achieved the right to vote, they have voted in greater numbers than men. Men and women inherit equally from both parents, receiving the same share of land, houses, boats, and other household goods. Women can easily initiate divorce, and mothers receive the custody of children in the majority of cases.

Abortion laws prohibit the termination of a pregnancy (the penalty for which is imprisonment for 10 years) except in the case of danger to the woman's health.

Education

Since the 1970s, Bahamian women have enjoyed unrestricted access to education, and now girls exceed boys in performance at all levels of schooling, and the female literacy rate (96.3%) now exceeds the male rate (94.6). Although women have equal access to job opportunities, most women still occupy relatively secondary positions in the economy.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Bahamian women have the liberty to date and choose their own partners. The legal age for marriage is 18 for women, and minors can marry with the permission of the parents. Generally, women get married in their thirties, but wide age differences can exist between the ages in Bahamian couples, with 60 year-old men sometimes marrying 20 year-old girls. Though monogamous marriages are the norm in Bahamas, some men tend to have common law relationships with other women. Generally, women take on their husbands' name upon marriage and rarely retain it after divorce. The Married Women's Property Act gives women equal property rights, so Bahamian women can own, buy, and sell or transfer property at will.

The number of households headed by women has increased recently in the Bahamas. Even in families headed by men, women tend to have the final say in family matters. As far as children are concerned, society considers it bad if a woman has no children. For those entrenched in a divorce, the court decides the custody of children based on the financial needs of the child and the financial condition of the parents. However, in most cases women get custody of children.

Health

Bahamian women have equal access to the healthcare system. The country has many polyclinics that cater to the needs of pregnant women and infants. The improvement in health care facilities has decreased the maternal and infant mortality rates. In order to control the high occurrence of HIV in Bahamas, the government treats pregnant women with anti-viral drugs free of cost. Women have the right to make their own healthcare decisions. Only 65 percent of Bahamian women use contraceptives.

Women in Business

General View

Bahamian women still face many obstacles when it comes to their career options, although their situation is better than it was a generation ago. The Bahamian parliament now has many female legislators, due to a quota system that guarantees a minimum of 20 percent participation, and recent legislation is having a positive impact on women's lives.

Legal Rights

Bahamian women earned the right to vote in 1964. Inheritance legislation enacted in 2002 now permits men and women to inherit property equally.

Even though gender equality is asserted in present Bahamian law, inequalities still persist, and one example of this is that the constitution does not provide Bahamian with the same right as men to transmit citizenship to their foreign-born spouses or children.

Women in Professions

Men dominate higher income and higher status jobs in the public and private sectors. Women lead in the fields of nursing, elementary school teaching, and office work, and have a significant presence in the tourism and the hospitality industries (making up 25 percent of total employees) and in government (making up 30 percent of total employees). Only 10 percent of professionals involved in providing business services are women and the booming construction, maritime, and transportation industries remain male-dominated. Out-island women tend to engage in the traditional occupations of farming, shopkeeping, craft creation, and domestic labor. Overall, women earn 64 percent of what men earn for the same work.

Examples of successful Bahamian businesswomen are few but include Veronica Williams Dalrymple, president of the Caribbean Association of Women Entrepreneurs, and Thelma Hunkins, a funeral home director in Charlestown.

The laws of Bahamas do not prohibit women from doing any type of work, and there are no dress codes that bar women from entering any profession. Women wear

conservative business dresses in the office, and elsewhere wear casual clothing like slacks, skirts, and shorts.

Children of working women are usually taken care of by immediate family members, like grandparents, or by paid baby sitters. The Salvation Army runs a few childcare centers, and private child care centers also assist women in child care.

Women as Business Owners

Women typically own businesses in agriculture, small retail establishments, or small-scale enterprises that manufacture handicrafts.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Bahamians are not shy when it comes to showing hospitality and cordiality, and expect visitors to interact socially. Due to the proximity to the United States, Bahamian businesspeople tend to follow American business practices and expect their visitors to be punctual, while they themselves may arrive late. Conservative business suits are the norm at business meetings.

Bahrain

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditionally, Bahrain has been a patriarchal Islamic culture, with the *Sharia* (Islamic legal code) dictating women's place in society. Recently, the country witnessed many intrepid women taking on powerful Islamists in order to change the jurisdiction over family and women's affairs from *Sharia* to civil courts. The progressive Islamic state of Bahrain has seen the gradual emancipation of women in recent years. The reform movement launched by the government during the last few years has greatly enhanced women's status.

Though Bahraini women now have most legal rights, their freedoms are limited by social sanctions (supported by conservative Islamists), such as the requirement for them to get the permission of the head of the household to travel abroad and or even just to visit friends and relatives. Women belonging to the urban upper class have better facilities and opportunities, and they generally make up the progressives who are struggling to obtain greater gender equality.

Contrary to other Islamic countries in the region, Bahrain has set in motion a series of initiatives for the emancipation of women. Women's civil society groups are actively engaged in educational and human rights activities. Her Highness Shaikha Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, wife of His Majesty King Hamad and Chairwoman of the Supreme Council for Women, is actively promoting greater empowerment of Bahraini women in all areas of society, particularly economic and cultural.

Bahraini women are well-represented in all major professions but less so in politics and the judiciary, where women have virtually no ministerial representation, no representatives in the Lower House of Parliament, 15

percent of seats in the Upper House, and one female judge, Mona Al Kawari, recently appointed by Sheik Hamad. Bahraini women are active in the fields of journalism, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and nursing. They also have a significant representation in business, mostly as owners of small businesses, shops, boutiques, and rental properties.

Significant differences exist in the personal status laws relating to Sunni and Shiite women. While Shiite women can inherit all property in the absence of a direct male heir, Sunni women can only inherit a portion of the property in the absence of a direct male heir. Traditional Bahraini women dress conservatively and wear the *abaya* (a long loose-fitting black gown), and urban women generally wear modern clothing.

Legal Rights

Bahrain women got many of their political rights in 2002. Women now have the right to vote at the age of 18 and the right to drive vehicles. Though women can buy, own, and sell property, they often sanction the right of maintaining their property to a male relative such as the father, brother, or husband, due to the male-dominated nature of the real estate business. Bahrain laws prohibit abortions except when a pregnancy can endanger the life of the mother, or in case of early detection of a deformed fetus or a fetus with congenital defect.

Women can initiate divorce proceedings for reasons such as desertion, impotence, adultery, physical abuse, or non-support. Women can also divorce a husband who has AIDS on the grounds she might get infected. Due to the lack of a unified family law, the judgment on the custody of children is left to the discretion of a *Sharia* judge.

Education

Bahraini women have the same access to education as men and can avail themselves of free state education for 12 years (primary through secondary). The Bahraini female literacy rate is 79 percent compared to the male rate of 89 percent. Boys and girls have separate schools and are usually taught by teachers of the same sex. A few schools employ staff of both genders, and universities have co-education. Although women have more job opportunities now, social customs and tradition impede women from pursuing careers in such fields as industry, maintenance, and carpentry.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In Bahrain, parents usually arrange marriages, often with the help of a marriage broker or Islamic association. The groom and the bride often have an opportunity to meet each other before they marry and, although a woman cannot choose a life partner on her own, she can refuse the man recommended to her by her family. All marriages require the permission of the father or brother. Bahraini parents strictly monitor their daughters' meetings with men and discourage dating. Islamic law allows men to have up to four wives, if they can provide equally for all of them. Following Islamic tradition, women do not take the name of their husbands upon marriage but rather maintain their father's family name. Women take responsibility of all domestic chores and usually leave decision-making to husbands.

Under Bahrain family law, *Sharia* judges have complete power to deny women the custody of their children for subjective reasons. Upon divorce, the husband must maintain his ex-wife and any children from their marriage, if the wife cannot support herself. A woman receives *mahr* or bride money, as specified in the marriage contract on marriage, and after divorce she can take this money along with her.

Health

The Government of Bahrain grants equal access for all residents to healthcare via a comprehensive network of health care facilities. The low maternal mortality rate in Bahrain illustrates the high standard of medical care women receive. Public hospitals and health centers provide free primary and maternal health care. They also provide information on birth control, and health centers do not require a husband's consent to provide women with family planning services. In practice, women do not seek birth control services without the permission of their spouse, even if they have easy access to such services.

Interesting Social Customs

Under Bahraini nationality law, Bahraini men can pass their nationality to their foreign-born wives and the children of these marriages. In contrast, the law prohibits Bahraini women to transfer their nationality to their foreign-born spouses or their children from such unions. Bahraini men have the freedom to divorce their wives at any time, but women have to appeal to *Sharia* courts to obtain a divorce.

Women in Business

General View

Bahrain is one of the most progressive Islamic countries in the Middle East when it comes to empowering women. Bahrain opened the first school for girls in 1928, and over the years many women's organizations have been active in offering free education and technical skills training and in creating a wide range of job prospects for women. Today's Bahraini women are generally well educated, and, of the 25 percent of them who work outside the home, many hold senior executive posts in major industries and social organizations. The Bahrain Businesswomen Society Board is active in supporting and sponsoring women to achieve financial independence through the attainment of educational and professional skills, and this organization is patronized by Shaikha Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa, wife of the King and chairwoman of the Supreme Council for Women.

Legal Rights

Women have all the legal rights of men in Bahrain including the right to drive and, as of 2002, the right to vote. They hold the right to acquire, own, sell, and inherit land and other property, without any restrictions. Many Bahraini women, however, tend to delegate matters related to real estate and other assets to male members within the family, which has sometimes resulted in their exploitation and loss of assets.

Women in Professions

The number of female employees in both the private and public sectors increased from almost three-fold from 1981 to 2001. The largest number of female employees (almost 28 percent) was in the processing industry, followed by the banking and finance industry. Gaining political rights has also helped women to secure positions of authority within the government.

Access to education and professional training has opened up job opportunities in banking, medicine and paramedicine, journalism, and education. Women also make up a major part of the workforce in the garment industry, the import and sale of perfumes, cosmetics, and leather goods, and the sale of household goods. Some of the top Bahraini businesswomen and female executives include Huda Janahi, a renowned private investor, Lulwa Mutlaq, senior vice president of the Arab Banking Corporation in Bahrain, and Rana Ali Abbas Al Ammadi, the chief medical officer of Aluminum Bahrain.

The growth prospects for Bahraini businesswomen appear very encouraging in the light of the progressive attitudes held by the elite in government and society.

Dress-code restrictions do exist to some extent in Bahrain, and Bahraini women who wear European clothes in an office or at home (full-length skirts or slacks and conservative blouses) may don a full-length traditional cloak and scarf, which either partially or fully covers their face, in public.

Traditional Bahraini families live together in extended families, and parents or grandparents look after the. Working couples living in nuclear family units usually engage governesses or nannies to look after their children. Although privately owned crèche and childcare centers exist, state-sponsored ones are not available.

Women as Business Owners

The Bahrain Businesswomen's Society Board has helped women establish their own businesses at the micro, small, and medium level. Many women-owned businesses are involved in the importing and marketing of consumer goods. Contract-based undertakings such as building maintenance, employment agencies, sanitation, engraving, mechanical repair works, furnishing, and interior decoration are also popular.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Bahraini businessmen treat foreign businesswomen with courtesy verging on chivalry. A letter of introduction from a previous business associate helps in establishing trust.

Formal, full-length Western clothing is appreciated in Bahrain, and an efficient, professional attitude is best while dealing with both Bahraini businessmen and women. Bahraini businesspeople are most helpful when their help and suggestions are sought for business-related matters, and they take pleasure in offering you guidance. Prior appointments, punctuality, and the small ritual of exchanging and reading business cards printed in Arabic and English are important business customs in Bahrain. Designations are important in Bahrain, and acquainting oneself with the appropriate use of titles such as *Sheikh*, *Hajji*, and *Begum* helps in creating relationships based on trust and respect.

Bangladesh

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The culture of Bangladesh is predominantly patriarchal. Despite the fact that two female Prime Ministers have ruled the country, women generally have had to accept secondary status in everything from healthcare and nutrition to education and employment opportunities.

Life is tough for all Bangladeshis, but tougher for women. Only one-third of women over fifteen years of age are literate (compared to half of the men), and female life expectancy is a mere 55 years (a year less than men). Women's wages are 58 percent of men's wages for equivalent jobs.

Women constitute less than half of the population (perhaps due to the practice of gender selection at birth), and the vast majority (85 percent) is rural and dependent on agriculture. Women in rural Bangladesh are more tightly bound by strict Islamic laws and customs. The labor force, however, is slowly shifting from rural agricultural work to more urban manufacturing. Consequently, women's wages, working hours, childcare options, access to healthcare, and education have all shown signs of improvement.

Bangladeshi women's dress is similar to that of Indian Bengalis, where most women wear *saris* and *salwar kameez*. Muslim women are required to wear the *burqa* (a garment covering the whole body), and most women wear headscarves.

Legal Rights

Bangladeshi women have equal rights under the secular constitution. They have the right to vote and to run for elected office. Women can obtain passports and change or retain their nationality without the consent of their husbands or fathers. They have the right to drive.

The inheritance laws, however, vary according to the religion of the Bangladeshi. According to Muslim law, a woman will inherit only half the share of any property. A widow receives one-fourth of her husband's property when there are no children and one-eighth part when

there are children. If the marriage is polygamous, the share is divided equally among the wives.

Abortion is legal, with a total of 100,300 abortions performed every year. Bangladeshi women can obtain divorce on many grounds under the Muslim, Hindu, and Christian laws.

Education

The Government has taken the initiative to boost female literacy rates through policies like free education for girls at secondary school levels, food-for-education, and the allocation of 60 percent of women as primary school teachers. The literacy rate of women over age 15 is 31 percent, compared to 50 percent for men.

A large number of educational institutions have been set up exclusively for boys or girls. Co-educational institutions are rare.

Low educational standards give women a disadvantage in the job market. Eighty percent of the 1.4 million workers in the export garment industry are women. Women are also involved in the electronics, food processing, beverage, and handicraft industries.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Marriages are generally arranged through relatives, friends, or marriage agencies when the parents decide that the time is ripe for their daughters to get married. Women have the liberty of choosing from among five or six potential candidates. Dating is not approved in Muslim society, but may be allowed among Christians and Hindus in cities in chaperoned circumstances. Women and men generally meet at social and religious events, or at educational and professional settings.

Men get married at an average age of 25 while women marry at an average age of 18. Marriages between minors are not void, but may attract penalties. Polygamy is strongly discouraged now, and cases of polygamous marriages are rare. All property and assets given to a woman as dowry or bridal gifts during her marriage belong solely to her, and she is permitted to deal with such property by herself, according to the Hindu and Muslim laws.

Bangladeshi society is very traditional and conservative: women are expected to look after the household, while men are the real decision-makers. Only the laws of divorce are in favor of the Bangladeshi women. Divorce can be obtained on many grounds under the Muslim, Hindu, and Christian laws.

In case of a divorce, it is the father who is considered the guardian of the children. According to the Muslim law, mothers are given custody of their daughters until they attain puberty, and of their sons until they are seven years old. If the father dies, the father-in-law of the widow is given custody of the children. Hindu law considers the father to be the legal guardian of a minor child. During divorce proceedings the court may heed the choice of the affected children in determining custody.

Health

The maternal mortality rate is very high in Bangladesh (380 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2003), but healthcare facilities for women are improving. The 2003 infant mortality rate of 46 deaths out of 1,000 live births is two-thirds lower than it was in 1970. Women in traditional Muslim families must obtain the consent of a male family member for any major healthcare decisions. .

Abortion is legal. Couples opting for contraceptives must be married to each other, with at least two children, and the youngest child must be over two years old. People seeking sterilization must voluntarily agree to the procedure, and they cannot be divorcees or mentally unstable. Almost 54 percent of married women between fifteen and forty-nine years old use contraception. Pills, sterilization, and injectable contraceptives are the most popular choices.

Women in Business

General View

Traditionally, Bangladeshi women have played a subordinate role to men, confining their activities to household and family responsibilities. They were subjected to the religious prejudices and superstitions of a patriarchal society and rarely had any representation in decision making-positions, relegating them to temporary, casual, part-time, contract, or home-based employment.

The modern Bangladeshi woman's status in society is gradually improving, however, due to increased access to education and the activities of grassroots-level women's NGOs.

Legal Rights

The Bangladeshi constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities to women. Bangladeshi women gained suffrage in the year 1972 when their country was born. Before then, and after independence from Great Britain in 1947, they had voting rights as citizens of East Pakistan, but they had little opportunity to exercise this right due to long spells of military rule.

Women's rights of inheritance vary according to their religion. Under the Muslim law of inheritance, a woman has the eligibility to inherit only half the share of her male counterpart (in other words, a brother and sister would split their parents' estate 66.6%/33.3%). Also, Muslim law prohibits a woman from owning land but gives her full authority over her dowry.

Wage inequality in the informal sector has resulted in women receiving substantially lower salaries than men for the same work.

Women in Professions

Bangladeshi women work primarily in the agricultural sector. Since 1980, an increasing number of women are working in manufacturing, particularly in the garment industry. Educated women are increasingly taking significant roles in the government, health care, and teaching, although in small numbers.

Women have little representation in business and less in politics, despite Bangladesh being governed by two strong female prime ministers.

Among well-known female leaders are: Najma Akhter, who is a trade union leader in the garment industry; Dr. Hyat, who serves as the chairman of a *Poura Shave* (local administrative body); Rokia Rahman, the president of Women Entrepreneurs' Association; Jesmin Ahmed's owner of the fashion house *Karaukaj* and winner of the Shining Personality Award 2005 from the Narikantha Foundation for women entrepreneurship.

Labor laws prohibit women from working after 8p.m. Some Bangladeshi women dress conservatively and wear the *burqa* or *pardah*, which conceals their body; but modern professional women wear clothes like *sarees* and *salwar kameez*.

Mothers serve as the primary caretakers of children, but immediate and extended family members help share the responsibility of childcare for working women. Apart from the state-sponsored childcare facilities, a few manufacturing units provide company-sponsored daycare services.

Women as Business Owners

The many legal and customary barriers to ownership of land, credit, and technology are the primary impediments to women's business aspirations. Generally women run small enterprises in traditional handicrafts, clothing, jewelry, textiles, and processed food.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although Bangladesh is an Islamic country, foreign women in the business and professional spheres are respected and appreciated. Foreign businesswomen should expect, however, to meet their local counterparts mainly in business settings and to avoid casual behavior, as it can be considered disrespectful. Conservative Muslim men do not shake hands with women.

Belarus

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Freedom from Soviet rule and the transition to market economy has created an interesting situation for Belarusian women. They have been able to keep all of their gains during the Socialist period intact, and economic reforms have opened up new avenues for their empowerment. Gender roles in Belarus remain very strong, with men serving as breadwinners and acting as the more powerful gender, and women required to take care of the children and household. This traditional structure is slowly changing, however, as noted by a Belarusian diplomat at the U.N., Aleg Ivanou, who mentioned that the period 2000-2004 was a glorious one in Belarus' national gender policy, as increased opportunities had provided diverse platforms for women's participation in all spheres of life.

Women have significant representation in politics and, in 2004, they constituted one-third of the membership of both the houses of parliament. The head of the Central Election Commission is a woman and women are also well represented in the judiciary, with 46 percent of judges and 62 percent of defense lawyers. Among the *nouveau riche* families of the present capitalist era, the wives are content to devote themselves to their homes – and their moneymaking husbands – in return for material comforts. In most families, though, women combine their domestic and professional lives, putting them under a lot of stress. The Union of Women in Belarus, one of the first feminist initiatives that came into existence in 1991, and other organizations of a trade union character have come forward to address the problems of both working and unemployed women.

There is not much difference between women in rural and urban areas, and urban women are no less heavily burdened. Belarus has an ethnically and religiously diverse society comprising Belarusians, Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Muslims, Christians, Poles, and Roma (Gypsies), and women of all ethnic groups have more or less the same status. There is no dress code for Belarusian women, who are equally comfortable in traditional dresses as they are in contemporary European clothes.

Legal Rights

The Belarus Constitution grants equal treatment for women with regard to property ownership and inheritance, family law, and judiciary. Women gained the right to vote in 1919, during the early Soviet era. They have the same right as men to possess, enjoy, and dispose of assets, either individually or jointly with others. Women can also initiate divorce proceedings and access birth control methods, including abortion, which is legal in Belarus and which has come under severe criticism from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Although parents have equal rights to raise, sustain, and educate their children, it is the mother who serves as the primary childcare provider and manager of the household.

Surveys also show that women bear the burden of most or all of the work done in the house.

Education

The Belarusian Constitution grants every citizen the right to receive education in accordance with her/his capabilities, with a freely accessible general secondary and professional technical education. Men and women share classrooms, and the female literacy rate is 99 percent compared to 100 percent for men.

More women than men receive higher education, but they still find it harder to find employment equal to their qualifications. Moreover, women tend to remain concentrated in educational fields such as cultural studies, education, and foreign languages, which have little chance of leading to highly paid jobs. Added to this are the fact that the government does not have a policy aimed at equal employment possibilities for women and men, so women are routinely questioned about their marital status and family obligations during job interviews, and some state institutions even go to the extent of stipulating a 'no child' precondition for employment. As a consequence, women in the 40- to 50-year-old age group find it easier to become employed. Women are also more likely than men to be fired during the downsizing of enterprises.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditional Belarusian marriages require the consent of the boy and girl as well as that of the families involved. These days, however, women enjoy considerable freedom of choice and have many opportunities to meet young men. Women meet men at educational, social, and professional settings, and at various public gatherings. Dating is permitted, and the legal age for marriage is 18 for both sexes.

Traditionally, women take the husband's family name, but there have been instances of famous Belarusian women retaining their own family names. In Belarus, it is the father who assumes the position of the family's head, and after his death, any of his sons (usually the eldest) takes charge. The Marriage and Family Code decrees that all assets acquired during marriage are considered common property, irrespective of who has acquired the property, or in whose name it is registered. Both spouses have equal rights to manage, use, and dispose of their common property. Any property acquired prior to marriage or inherited during the marriage is considered private property of that spouse.

Childlessness has no stigma attached to it. In the event of a divorce, the law grants women custody of children. Fathers receive custody only if the mother is deprived of her maternal rights, or if she is incapacitated due to ill health. In cases where the mother is an alcoholic or leads an immoral life, the court leaves it to the child to decide, provided that he/she is over the age of ten.

Health

The Belarusian constitution guarantees an equal right to healthcare for women. In the mid 1990s, the first steps

toward the establishment of perinatal and neonatal care were made, and both the Ministry of Health and private industry sponsors equipped the centers with the necessary medical equipment and training.

Women in Belarus are allowed to make their own health care decisions. The European bureau of the World Health Organization has provided assistance to Belarus for family planning matters. Besides this, several women's organizations and NGOs have also made significant contributions to protecting the reproductive health of women.

Interesting Social Customs

Traditional Belarus wedding practice dictates that daughters follow the "order in priority," which means that the eldest daughter has to be married first, followed by the next eldest, and so on. If the order was broken, for whatever reason, it was considered a disgrace to the family.

Women in Business

General View

The role and perception of Belarus women has undergone a sea change during the last decade and a half. At the end of the Soviet era women, constituted 50% of the Belarus labor force. Unfortunately they became the chief victims of the transition to market economy with women making up 60% of the unemployed in 1996. The initiatives of feminist organizations like the Union of Women in Belarus and the League of Women in Belarus have aimed at the protection and improvement of women's rights during the last decade; but traditional gender roles have been slow to change, and men still dominate the economy and the job market.

Legal Rights

Belarus gave women the right to vote in 1919. The Constitution of Belarus incorporates generally accepted principles of international law; it affirms women's right to equality without any discrimination under Article 35, which contains provisions on equality of men and women in the family and grants women equal opportunity in receiving education and professional training, as well as in socio-political, cultural, and economic spheres

Women are guaranteed equal rights with men to own and inherit property without any discrimination. With certain exceptions for unmarried daughters, men and women have equal rights to family property. A woman's earnings by way of selling her garden products remain her property, and the family has no right over such assets. Moreover, the wife cannot be held responsible for her husband's debts, while the husband is liable for his wife's debts.

Despite the constitutional provisions assuring gender equality, Belarus women earn only around two-thirds of men's wages. According to statistics, one million Belarusians receive wages that fall below the poverty indicator, and 82% of these working poor are women. In order to earn higher wages, women accept jobs that involve harmful working conditions, and the number of women working under hazardous and unsafe conditions was measured at 31.9% in 1998.

Women in Professions

Some of the traditional areas in which women find employment include tailoring, wholesale trading, hairdressing, cosmetology, micro industries, and agriculture.

Though women account for 62.8% of the employees in governmental bodies, only 10.4% hold management-level positions. The cabinet includes 7.3% women, while 23.7% of women are in the legislature. Even though they constitute 63% of Belarusian Radio and Television Company employees, and 62% of the Belarusian State Press Committee, they do not hold management positions in either of these two organizations. In national newspaper offices, women form only 7% of the chief editors, 15% of executive secretaries, 18% of deputy editors, and 21% of senior editors. Many private employers show reluctance to employ married women, as they have to grant privileges like maternity leave.

Female business leaders in Belarus include: Anna Nikitichna Shenderuk, owner of small retail trading enterprise, *Shance*; Olga Nikolaevna Kalia, head of *Kunava*, a small manufacturer and marketer of male and female clothing; Tatyana Starovojt owns and directs a chain of mini-cafes, a tailoring enterprise, a travel agency, the company *Poljaris*, and the *Elza* trade center; and Zoja Zmushko is the director of the Small Business Support Center incubator located in the city of Mozyr.

Article 262 of the constitution enumerates the types of work prohibited for women. Prohibited jobs include heavy-duty work, work involving harmful or hazardous working conditions, underground work (except non-manual work or sanitary and consumer services), and manual lifting and transfer of weights exceeding the established limits.

Belarusian society does not have a specific dress code for women, and women tend to dress informally.

Home and childcare is considered the primary responsibility of women. Laws entitle working mothers to take maternity leave and paid sick leave when their children fall sick.

The State also runs affordable kindergartens and childcare centers.

Women as Business Owners

Although Belarusian laws give equal opportunities for women to become entrepreneurs, women own only 5% of small and medium enterprises, owing to limited access to finance and credit. Rural women find it even more challenging to start businesses. More than 60% of Belarusian women are shuttle traders and street vendors.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Business customs in Belarus are similar to those in Russia. Belarusians are a hospitable people, and they welcome foreigners with warmth and friendship. A brief handshake suffices at initial meetings, but enthusiastic hugs are not uncommon once good business relationships are established. Foreign businesswomen should engage the services of a local lawyer because of the complexity of Belarusians laws and regulations. Foreign businesswomen are expected to follow a conservative dress code.

Belgium

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Belgian women generally enjoy equality with men and are active in social, political, and economic areas of the society. Traditionally, Belgium had a patriarchal system that regarded women as subordinate to men. The rise of the European Union and the implementation of its progressive laws have, however, done much to break down traditional attitudes and open up opportunities.

Belgian legislation guarantees women equal rights and protects them from all types of discrimination. Domestic violence, however, is quite pervasive, with one in five women reporting abuse and one in six subject to significant injuries.

The Belgian government has instituted several commissions to monitor women's rights in various areas and have made women eligible to join the armed forces if they meet the same physical standards as male candidates.

Since 2002, it has been mandatory for all political parties to have an equal number of male and female candidates in both regional and federal elections. At the present time, women hold 53 seats in the 150-seat Chamber of Representatives and 26 seats in the 70-seat Senate. There are also 12 women among 33 regional ministers and five among 21 federal cabinet ministers. There are a significant number of female lawyers and doctors in Belgium as well. Almost 25 percent of the entrepreneurs and 62 percent of the self-employed in Belgium are women. The service sector, which provides abundant part-time job opportunities, has a high participation of women in the labor force.

Belgian women mostly wear standard Western business attire in professional settings and fairly conservative clothes on other occasions. Recently, the Belgian government made it illegal for public employees to wear headscarves on the job.

Legal Rights

The Belgian Constitution assures women equal rights with men in all walks of life. Belgian women got the universal right to vote and contest in elections in 1948. Women even have the legal right to become prostitutes.

Under inheritance laws, all children, irrespective of gender, receive equal shares of the parents' property. A wife can inherit the entire estate of her spouse and later pass it to her children.

Women can legally terminate their pregnancy in a standardized health center with the approval of a doctor.

Belgian women also have equal rights to initiate divorces. Upon divorce, the parents can mutually decide the custody of children or follow a court order. Children of divorced parents can live with both parents alternately or with one parent. Polygamy is legally prohibited in Belgium.

Education

Belgium offers free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 18, and almost 100 percent of all Belgians can read. The vast majority of girls and boys enroll in primary and secondary schools and study side by side under the coeducational system. About 56 percent of girls complete their secondary education, and almost all of them go on to complete a college education (53 percent of all women).

The 9 percent gap between the earnings of Belgian men and women is the lowest in the European Union.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Belgian women and men have the liberty to choose their own partners. Girls and boys typically begin dating in their teens, and they usually meet at schools, social settings, and workplaces. The legal age for marriage is 18 in Belgium, but the average age at which people marry has risen to 31.3 years for women and 34.2 years for men.

Although Belgian women do not legally add their husbands' family name after marriage, they may use it in everyday life. Belgian women have the right to hold assets separate from their husbands. Women have the right to initiate divorces. Upon divorce, both parents, regardless of joint or split child custody, have to contribute towards the maintenance and education of the children until they become adults or finish their studies.

Health

Belgian women have equal access to the country's comprehensive healthcare system with its large number of well-equipped, well-staffed private and public hospitals. The low rates of maternal and infant mortality rates (4.62 infant deaths per 1,000 live births) illustrate the quality of the medical care given to women.

Generally, Belgian women make their own healthcare decisions. Neither social norms nor the government restrict the use of contraceptives among women.

Interesting Social Customs

Belgians usually shake hands upon greeting and leaving and always repeat names quickly while shaking hands with everyone in the group. Upon meeting, men and women may also exchange kisses (three kisses on cheeks starting with the left cheek).

Women in Business

General View

Belgium has seen a remarkable growth in participation of women in the work force in the past few decades. Generally, Belgian women tended to occupy jobs in the traditional female sectors of teaching or nursing, but the availability of part-time jobs increased women's involvement in economic activity to the point where women now account for 30 percent of all part-time workers. Consequently, the occupational gender gap has shrunk among younger generation despite some lingering gender discrimination at the work place.

Legal Rights

The Belgian constitution guarantees women equal rights with men in social, political, and economic spheres, and the government has established The Institute for the Equality of Men and Women to sue those who contravene equality laws.

Belgium granted women universal suffrage only in 1948. Under law, women have rights to inherit equally from their parents. Widows are entitled to the entire property of their deceased spouse. The first step towards equal pay for equal work was taken in 1921, when male and female teachers received equal salaries. Belgium has the lowest wage gap between men and women in the European Union. On average, women earn 91 percent of a man's salary.

Women in Professions

Belgian women generally engage in the service sector and traditionally female professions. The textile industry, particularly lace-making, is dominated by women but is one of the few industries where women participate in any meaningful numbers. Women also hold fewer key positions in the government than in the private sector.

Two examples of successful Belgian businesswomen are Briclet Micheline, who runs Stratinfo CandGo, a network committed to enhance women in small and micro enterprises, and Michene Quintin, owner of the Centre of Relaxothérapie and ASBL Prévention in Brussels – a multi-field therapeutic center, which specializes in the problems of stress and associated disorders.

Legal provisions and government policies favor women's participation in the workforce and assist Belgian women in business. Women are not prohibited from doing any particular job. Generally Belgian women dress modestly in suits or dresses and appropriate elegant accessories for business meetings.

Parents, usually mothers, bear the primary responsibility for taking care of their children, and a network of public and private daycare centers helps working women in their child rearing. Subsidized daycare centers appoint trained childcare staff (*kinderverzorgster*) and give them specialized education in their field.

Women as Business Owners

Belgian women constitute 27 percent of self-employed workers and 16 percent of entrepreneurs. Mostly, they run small or micro enterprises in the service sector. Besides lace-making, women also have a considerable presence in businesses related to fisheries and agricultural activities. The statistics suggest that most women entrepreneurs are above 40 years of age, and they work with their family rather than as sole proprietors.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Belgian businesspeople treat foreign businesswomen and men alike in meetings and social gatherings. Always make prior appointments and arrive punctually for all meetings. Foreign women should dress modestly in suits or dresses. Belgians are frank and open in business negotiations.

Belgians usually shake hands both upon meeting and departure. Generally, Belgian men stand when meeting or greeting a woman and wait for the woman to extend her hand. Belgians who are well acquainted may exchange

three kisses, beginning from the left cheek, upon meeting. Men may also kiss women's hands.

A foreign woman should not hesitate to invite her male business counterpart for a dinner or to pay for the food. Let your business colleagues initiate business talks over dinners. Avoid cracking the fingers of both hands and patting people on the back, as Belgians consider this rude behavior. And for those women coming from Muslim countries, they should know that the city of Maaseik recently prohibited women from the wearing of *niqab* (veils).

Belize

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Belizean women have traditionally been trained from an early age to be docile and submissive to men, and their worth was judged largely by their function as wives and mothers. However, in subcultures within the nation like the native *Garifuna* and the African-descended *creole*, women enjoyed equal footing with men both at domestic and community levels, even functioning as healers and shamans. *Garifuna* men, known for their maritime skills, were often away hunting and fishing, giving women free rein to manage their family. *Garifuna* trace their bloodline through their mother's family.

Political, economic, and social reforms have positively influenced women of the upper class and those in urban areas, while women of less advantaged backgrounds remain marginalized. Despite initial apathy, many individuals, governmental agencies, and organizations have been working to improve the quality of life for Belizean women by promoting education, professional skills, and job opportunities. Female members of parliament make up 12 percent of total legislators. U.N. employment statistics show representation of female administrators and managers at 31.2 percent, and female technical and professional workers at 52 percent. Studies also show that women are under-represented in key areas of decisionmaking – in public administration, civil service, and private enterprises.

There are no dress code restrictions for Belizean women. Their traditional long, pleated skirts with blouse and the more recent long trousers with shirts are accepted attire.

Legal Rights

Women have legal equality with men in Belize. They attained the right to vote in 1954. They also enjoy the right to inherit and own property, although various native cultures do not recognize these constitutional rights, and many rural women are still denied their basic fundamental rights. While there is a conditional legal provision for terminating pregnancies when the mother's health is at risk, women do not normally have rights to abortion (a criminal offense) in Belize. Women have the right to initiate divorce on grounds of marital disharmony or other marriage related grounds. Under the Married Person's Protection Act of Belize, women can appeal to the court for custody of children under the age of 16 years.

Education

Government and non-governmental organizations of Belize have taken measures to eliminate discrimination against women with an initial focus on education. Today, women enjoy equal rights to education, and coeducation was implemented. Recent studies show that young women secure over half of the available spaces in secondary schools by virtue of their academic merit. Young women from rural areas often drop out of school, however, due to pressure from domestic responsibilities.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Belizean society highly values church-blessed marriages, despite the long-standing (and openly tolerated) custom of common law relationships. Girls begin dating by the age of 14 or 16, and friendships are formed chiefly in schools, colleges, and at the workplace. Women in some ethnic groups (like the *Maya*) marry as early as 14 or 16, but generally the marriage age is 18 or above. This trend is changing, and, today, career takes precedence over marriage for many Belizean urban women. As a Catholic-dominated country, polygamy is illegal in Belize.

Apart from inheriting properties, women of Belize can buy and own assets separate from her husband. The Married Women's Ordinance law offers special provisions to protect the property rights of women.

Belizean women have the right to retain their own name after marriage, and a decision to the contrary is entirely up to them. Customarily, men are shown deference as heads of families, however female-headed households do exist among the *Garifuna* and *Creole* cultures. Like in many cultures, it is considered unfortunate and unlucky if a woman bears no children, and, often, family members and community intervene to initiate a divorce and a second marriage to carry on the bloodline. In case of a divorce, Marriage Person's Protection Act of Belize instructs the husband to pay a percentage of his total income as alimony, which would automatically dissolve on the wife's remarriage. The woman also has the right to properties that she owned prior to or during her marriage with or without her husband's assistance. Custody of children, under the age of 16, as a rule goes to the mother, and the court orders child support allowance until the child attains 16 years of age.

Health

Although Belize provides equal health services to all its citizens, rural women do not have easy access to adequate health care facilities. Lack of proper transportation, inadequate health care centers and health care officials, and deep-seated beliefs in traditional and native home remedies are probable explanations for the lack of proper access. Prenatal and postnatal mothers are the most affected, and studies by the Pan American Health Organization show more than 40 percent of women seen at prenatal clinics as anemic, with serious iron and vitamin A deficiencies. Census figures have also shown a maternal mortality ratio of 140 per 100,000 live births in Belize. In traditional Belize, family members and community determine health care decisions for women. Rigid cultural practices continue to cling to age-old herbal and spiritual healing systems. Education and better health care services have helped stamp out these old beliefs to a great extent. Birth control is not widely accepted, and it is common for Belizean women to have many children.

Women in Business

General View

Belizean women face many discriminatory practices, which give them a very low status in the employment market. In 1999, about 20 percent of women were unemployed, as opposed to 9 percent of men. Belize, like the whole Caribbean region, has a high proportion of female-headed households and a high occurrence of poverty in such households.

The UN Decade for Women (1976 to 1985) inspired Belizean women to organize for their social and economic betterment and the Belize Organization for Women and Development (BOWAND), and similar NGOs have since worked to advance the conditions of rural and urban women, resulting in better legal and political standing for them. The fact that women received 35 percent of small business loans in 1999, points to some degree of success in these efforts and may bode well for the future Belizean businesswomen.

Legal Rights

Belizean women earned the right to vote in 1954. Women have the right to inherit property from their husband and they also enjoy the right to acquire, control and dispose of properties. Despite legal codes promising equal pay for equal labor, women receive less pay and very often are overtaken by less qualified men for senior positions. Although 70% of school teachers are female, only 45% females are principals.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Belizean women have found job opportunities in the female-dominated professions of teaching, nursing, and secretarial posts. Many of them also work in low paying manufacturing jobs or clerical jobs in the tourism sector.

There are hardly any female heads of companies in the country. Belizean women do not have easy access to credit facilities to finance agricultural or business undertakings. Marie Sharp is an exception. She launched a business making hot sauce for the local market and today exports products worth US\$1.5 million to Japan and the U.S.

Qualified women professionals are now gradually being identified and acknowledged, and career prospects are better now than they were a few years ago. Belizean women are not barred from joining any profession.

Women wear long or knee-length frocks with sleeves, in general, and these are permitted in the work place, unless the company insists on a uniform dress code for all employees.

Children of working mothers are looked after by other family members or are sometimes taken to the work place. There are no state-run childcare centers for the children of working mothers, and the general lack of childcare alternatives forces many women to abandon their jobs in order to look after their children.

Women as Business Owners

Because of difficulties faced in financing agricultural or business enterprises, it is difficult for women to own businesses. Some women own small enterprises making

confectioneries, garments, and traditional handicrafts, which cater exclusively to tourists.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen can sometimes not be taken seriously by local businesspeople. A pleasant and polite approach is recommended since a too easy-going or friendly attitude could be misinterpreted as flirting. Foreign businesswomen should also take care of their security and travel in groups wherever possible, since petty crime and muggings are common in urban areas.

Benin

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In traditional Benin society, women do not exist independently as an individual – they are identified with either their father or husband. Customary and traditional laws restrict women to the role of housewives, farm hands, and child bearers. Childhood and forced marriages, child exchange for labor for the rich, and widowhood ceremonies are some of the extreme situations faced by Beninese women.

Girls from the age of five or so are actively involved in housekeeping, sibling care, and agriculture. Family members and community collectively take decisions in terms of initiation into womanhood and marriage.

Initial schemes launched by government to educate women were openly defied and thwarted by many community elders and male citizens. Ironically, many women from the rural sectors also resisted attempts at education, fearing banishment and ostracism. Urban Beninese women were more fortunate and had lesser social taboos to overcome, getting easier access to education and development. Public awareness campaigns, adult education centers, social promotion centers, and manuals and brochures on the new Personal and Family Code were undertaken to promote these political and social reforms. Beninese women have since made inroads into various fields such as education, health services, banking, and tourism.

The percentage of women in decision-making positions in the government continues to be low, with women's representation the highest in the Ministry of Health, where they occupy 35 percent of positions. In decision-making roles and as technical staff, women comprise a mere 7.3 percent, and comprise less than 19 percent of high-level administrative and management staff. Urban women have had a more flexible attitude towards traditional values, and growth and development have been adopted as a cultural necessity. Many of the progressive changes for the welfare of women have still failed to infiltrate certain Beninese subcultures, which resist modernization and cling to their age-old customs and practices.

There are no dress code restrictions for Beninese women. Most women wear their traditional *pagnes*, a full-length dress of dazzling colors and patterns with a head scarf. Traditional dress or western dress is equally accepted in all professional settings in Benin.

Legal Rights

The Beninese constitution guarantees equal access to healthcare, education, cultural information, professional training, and employment for all its citizens. Women also have the right to vote (since 1956) and can own and inherit property. However, social and civil legislation with regard to women and children is strongly influenced by tradition and customs. Matters of inheritance vary within different subcultures and, despite national laws permitting women to own and inherit property, in practice brothers or sons usually inherit properties.

A 1920 French law that prohibits incitement to abortion still remains in force in Benin. A woman who procures her own abortion is punishable with a minimum of two years imprisonment and a fine at the discretion of a judge. Women may initiate divorce against their husbands on grounds of ill-treatment, impotence, a failure to contribute to household needs, incurable or repulsive diseases, attempted murder, or insanity.

Education

According to Article 8 of the Benin constitution, every citizen has equal right of access to education, culture, information, job training, and employment. However, in practice, women do not have the same access to education as men, as reflected in the disparity of a 23 percent female literacy rate and the male literacy rate of 46 percent (2000-2004). Girls are often prevented from going to school since Beninese place higher value on doing household chores and learning to be good wives and mothers than education. Men and women share the same classroom space in Benin. Although educated women have the same job opportunities as men, married women with children often become 'second best choice' for prospective employers.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Choosing one's own mate is frequently seen among the urban, educated Beninese but family elders usually still arrange most marriages in Benin. Women are not allowed to date in traditional Beninese culture, though a trend towards dating is evident in urban Benin where girls may begin dating as early as 14 to 16 years of age. Colleges, the workplace, social functions, and the Internet all provide means for modern Beninese women to meet their partners.

Although the legal age for marriage is 15, in many ethnic subcultures girls may be betrothed to boys when they are as young as 5 years old and married by the age of 10. Polygamy is socially and legally acceptable in Benin, and multiple wives are customary. Among wives, the order of seniority is strictly followed, and the senior wife usually has the last word in decision-making.

Beninese women can acquire and hold properties in their name, although in certain subcultures within the country, customary law dominates, and sons, brothers, or other male relatives inherit properties. The New Marriage Act of Benin permits a woman to retain her maiden name, and if she so desires she may affix her husband's name to it. A Beninese household centers on the woman of the house, and decisions on economy and domestic finance rarely take place without their guidance.

It is considered unfortunate and unlucky if women bear no children, and most barren women are either abandoned or divorced by their husbands. Under the law, bride money as compensation and allowance is settled on the divorced woman. The marriage contract often dictates the terms of child custody, or, in its absence, by existing rules in the community or by the court, keeping in view the child's best interests.

Health

Legally, Beninese women have the right of equal access to healthcare services. Lack of awareness, dogged belief in traditional healing systems, and financial constraints have, however, deprived many women of basic health care services. Maternal and infant mortality rates are high at 500 for 100,000 births and 85 for 1,000 live births respectively. Many Beninese women still cling to traditional modes of treatment and, besides, many of them show reluctance to display their private illnesses to a stranger, even if he is a doctor. Contraception is accepted in modern Beninese culture, and women follow both modern and traditional methods of contraception.

Women in Business

Beninese women do not participate in business to any appreciable degree. The adoption of multiparty democracy and free-market economic practices has not visibly benefited women. Women continue to assume the traditional roles with responsibility for childcare and household work and are still subject to cultural practices like female genital mutilation.

The increase in the number of women's associations and NGOs concerned with the promotion of women's welfare, particularly in the areas of literacy, income-generation, savings, and credit, is beginning to affect a slow change in the status of Beninese women. According to a UN report, the government of Benin has stated that, "as of May 1999, about 80 percent of the government's credit programs for the development of micro-enterprises have benefited women."

Legal Rights

Beninese women won the right to vote in 1956. Women face extensive social discrimination – especially in rural areas – despite the political, economical, and social rights they are guaranteed under the constitution. Though Beninese laws grant women equal property and inheritance rights with men, tribal customs in many areas makes those laws ineffective – women never inheriting real property as a consequence.

Beninese women engaged in wage jobs were just 10 percent of the total workforce, and they generally earned less than men.

Women in Professions

Women perform 60 to 80 percent of agricultural work in rural areas where the majority of Beninese live. Beninese women traditionally work in the family fields planting, weeding, harvesting, and doing post-harvest storage and processing work. In spite of the women's participation in majority of agricultural work, they do not have similar representation in agricultural and rural organizations.

A low percentage of women are in decision-making positions in ministries and government bodies. Overall, women hold only 2.5 percent of the highest decision-making positions in government and comprise less than 19 percent of higher-level administrative and management staff in public office. In urban areas, women tend to dominate the trading sector in the open-air markets.

Beninese women have also done well in the arts, as is evidenced by the artist Pélagie Gbaguid and the singer Angélique Kidjo.

Women are traditionally barred from working in fish farming in *acadjas* ("brush park" type installations native to Beninese lagoons), as it is considered the traditional job of men; but women of the Toffin and Pedah tribes got around this by paying men to build fish holes and *acadjas* in the lagoons of lower Benin.

Women dress conservatively, in modest clothing. Avoid tight-fitting slacks and mini-skirts, which are considered sexually provocative.

Mothers usually take responsibility for childcare, and working women generally have siblings or other family members take care of the child during work hours. Benin has very few childcare centers, although USAID is assisting the Benin government to set up many welfare centers for children.

Women as Business Owners

Only a negligible percentage of Beninese women engage in business apart from work in agricultural markets. With more credit facilities and encouragement from the Beninese government, more women are setting up micro enterprises.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

French influence is much in evidence in Beninese business culture. Foreign businesswomen should take time to greet everyone present at a meeting appropriately, shaking hands with each and everyone present, and doing the same upon departure. Refusing offerings of food and drink (a key ingredient of hospitality) is considered rude. Dress conservatively and modestly.

Bermuda

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women are experiencing considerable positive changes in their economic, political, and social status in Bermuda. Many are entering business, politics, and the professions, and some have obtained powerful corporate and government positions. A significant number of females work in business, law, medicine, and media in Bermuda. They still, however, face some degree of gender discrimination.

Female participation in the Bermudan government continues to increase. In the House of Assembly, 22 percent of members were women in 2003, and two consecutive Premiers of Bermuda were female (Pamela Gordon was the first woman Premier in 1997-1998 and Jennifer Smith succeeded her for a five-year term during 1998-2003).

There are no specific dress code restrictions for women, who typically wear Western-style clothing.

Legal Rights

The Bermudan Constitution offers social, economic, and political rights to all citizens, irrespective of gender. Bermudan women have had the universal right to vote and run for office since 1968. They also have the right to own and inherit property.

Both men and women have the right to initiate divorces, as well as the right to custody of their children after a divorce.

Education

Bermuda offers free and compulsory education to all its citizens until age 17. An almost equal percentage of girls and boys enroll in primary and secondary schools. Coeducational as well as single-sex academic institutions exist.

In 2005, the female literacy rate was 99 percent, compared to the male literacy rate of 98 percent. Bermudan women are also attaining higher levels of education than men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In Bermuda, women and men choose their own partners and get married after publicizing a *Notice of Intended Marriage* in the local newspapers. These days, many Bermudans in their teens use online dating as well as personal connections.

The legal marriage age is 21 years old in Bermuda, and girls and boys as young as 16 can marry with their parents' or legal guardian's written consent.

Bermudan women have the right to hold assets separate from their husbands. Typically, women are in charge of household duties, and they take care of the children and elders in the family.

In case of a divorce, mothers have equal rights to custody of children. However, where one spouse is Bermudan and the other non-Bermudan, the legal custody of the children is usually given to the native parent.

Health

Bermuda offers access to public and private healthcare systems to all citizens. The government gives high priority to maternal and child health, student and elders' healthcare, dental health, and the prevention of communicable diseases.

Many hospitals and healthcare centers, registered under the Bermuda Hospital Board, offer primary and specialized healthcare facilities like prenatal and postnatal care, family planning, and pediatric healthcare. The Health Department also monitors such issues as food safety, water and air quality, personal and environmental health, and immunization.

The 2005 estimate of the infant mortality rate in Bermuda is between seven and ten deaths per 1,000 live births.

Bermudan women make their own healthcare decisions and have access to all necessary medical services in the country, including services related to healthy childbirth and family planning.

Interesting Social Customs

There are some interesting traditions surrounding Bermudan weddings. The newly married couple is made to walk under a moon gate (a round gateway arch) as a symbol of good fortune. There are typically two wedding cakes, one for the bride and another for the groom. The bride's cake is beautified with silver leaf and a cedar sapling that is replanted as a sign of the couple's growing love. Similarly, the groom's cake is topped with gold leaf as a sign of prosperity.

Women in Business

General View

Bermudan women play a very active role in their affluent economy, making up half of the country's total labor force. Women are employed in important positions in business, the civil service, and the professions.

Although Bermudan law treats both sexes equally and women are obtaining higher education and financial freedom, the top decision-making positions in companies still remain in the hands of men. Women, irrespective of their jobs, are expected to continue to perform their familial and domestic duties in addition to their jobs.

Legal Rights

Bermudan law treats women and men equally in all spheres. Women obtained the right to vote and contest elections in 1968. Women also have the right to run a business and the right to own and inherit property.

Although employment opportunities for Bermudan women have increased, they receive about ten percent less pay than men.

Women in Professions

Women dominate employment in education, community services, and retail and wholesale businesses. There are

also many women in the banking and financial services (the country's large industry), but there are few female heads or managers of the law firms, banks, maritime, and hospitality companies in Bermuda. A few notable exceptions are Ola Lorentzon and Kate Blankenship, the chairperson and the financial director, respectively, of Knightsbridge Tankers Ltd., an oil and gas transportation company, and Dianna Kempe, the senior partner of Appleby, Spurling, and Kempe, an international law firm.

A significant percentage of women are graduating from law and medical colleges and are pursuing careers in those fields. There are no restrictions on women entering any profession.

A formal dress code may be followed at the workplace, but there are no specific dress code restrictions for professional Bermudian women.

Working mothers have access to nurseries, preschools, and approved childcare providers (registered with the Environmental Department). The state-sponsored childcare program caters to the health, safety, education, training, and recreation needs of children up to four years of age, across the island.

Women as Business Owners

Although Bermudian law permits all its citizens to run businesses or own real property, there are few women business owners in the country. However, Bermuda is witnessing a considerable growth rate for women in business as the country's economy continues to expand.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The Bermudian attitude towards foreign businesswomen is polite and formal. There are many foreign businesspeople, of both genders, in financial service, insurance, and offshore banking industries.

For any business meeting, it is considered vitally important to make prior appointments and to arrive on time. Foreign women should follow a conservative dress code for business meetings and avoid short or revealing clothes. Shaking hands with everyone and exchanging business cards marks the start of a business meeting in Bermuda.

It is advisable that foreign women in Bermuda not travel alone.

Bolivia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Bolivian culture is essentially male-dominated, and women rarely make their way into positions of power in government, business, or education. Although the state accords equal right to men and women, discrimination and exploitation of women is quite common and has a direct relation to social status: the lower the social level, the higher the level of discrimination.

The stereotypes of women as excellent mothers and home-makers but as less intelligent, weak, and dependent is reflected through all social, economic, and educational levels. The positive effect of such perceptions is that women are regarded as the most important functionary in the nuclear family. The negative effect is that they are relegated to lower paid "woman's jobs" as nurses, secretaries, cooks, etc. despite having equal rights to employment opportunities, women often fall victim to wage discrimination and sexual harassment.

In the last decade, Bolivia has made significant progress in the improvement of women's economic activities and political participation. However, men continue to hold important positions of public authority, while the domestic arena (cooking and childcare) remains the female realm. In agriculture, men and women participate in all planting and harvesting tasks, and women predominate in the marketing of crops and weaving. The thriving domestic maid service is another example of the gendered division of labor, which depends on the recruitment of young, poor "Indian" girls to serve upper-class urban households.

Women hold 20 percent of the total seats in the lower house and 11 percent of the seats in the Senate but are poorly represented in government ministries. Similar

under-representation is seen in law and medicine. The indigenous women of Bolivia suffer serious hardships from high unemployment, extreme poverty, inequality, violence, and social exclusion.

Women have no dress code restrictions, and highland Indian women in both urban and rural areas still wear traditional skirts (*polleras*) and colorful shawls.

Legal Rights

Women have general rights that include the right to vote, drive vehicles, and own property. Successive Bolivian administrations have made significant advances in supporting women's causes, and there is an increasing participation of women in parliament due to the "Law of Quota" that ensures that every second candidate for public office on a party list is a woman. The Government has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in order to uphold the rights of women against abuse and violence. The Penal Code in Bolivia regards abortion as crime and revokes it only in therapeutic abortions or pregnancy resulting from non-consensual sex. In the event of divorce, a judge grants custody of children, based on the best interests of the children, to the parent that will provide the best care, and the noncustodial parent has to contribute towards child support.

Education

Men and women between the ages of 15 and 19 have virtually equal access to education. High levels of illiteracy are still found, however, among women in rural areas. The National Education Secretariat made coeducation mandatory in all stages of state school education in 1997.

Bolivian women also face significant discrimination and inequality in workplaces and earn half of what a man with

the same education and position. Most women in urban areas work in the informal economy and the services and trade sectors, whereas, in rural areas, the vast majority of economically active women are engaged in agriculture.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditional Bolivian marriages are ritualistic affairs with elaborate courtships and betrothals. In the highlands, where people have exposure to Western culture and customs, dating is practiced from a young age. The legal age of consent for marriage is 16 years for males and 14 for female, although under serious or justifiable circumstances, those below this age can marry with the approval of a family court judge. Young people generally meet at social and family events like wedding ceremonies and religious services.

Bolivian women add the husband's first surname to their first surname with the connector "de," and in the event of a divorce they revert to their maiden name. Polygamy is illegal in Bolivia except in some Oriente ethnic groups. The Civil Code in Bolivia grants women equal rights as men to acquire, hold, transfer, and inherit property. However, prevalent customary norms in rural communities limit women's ability to exercise these rights.

Bolivian women have a high fertility rate, averaging five children per woman. If a woman bears no children, Bolivian society may look down upon her. In a divorce, the law considers the property acquired during the marriage (including profits made during marriage) as joint property, which is divided equally between the two spouses. In cases of separation, divorce, or termination of a marriage, a judge will grant custody of children to the parent who will provide the best care for the children. The noncustodial parent is obliged to contribute child support.

Health

The Constitution recognizes the right to health as a fundamental right, and the government ensures that health and family planning services are offered countrywide, under the aegis of comprehensive Women's Health Services Program and the Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy. Women have no legal access to abortion, and thousands of women risk their lives in illegal abortions, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all maternal deaths. While contraception is freely available, its use is limited to educated, urban women. Rural and indigenous women often rely on unsafe 'traditional' practices, which further damage their reproductive and physical health. Lack of medical supervision or intervention also contributes to the high average maternal mortality rate of 602 women out of every 100,000 (higher among rural women).

Bolivian women typically do not make their own health care decisions, particularly as regards use of contraceptives and family planning. They have to consult with family members, especially the spouse, before making any decision.

Interesting Social Customs

Bolivian women sustain their ethnic identity through weaving and carrying forward the native language and their repertoire of songs to their offspring.

Women in Business

General View

Bolivian society has traditionally considered women as inferior to men. Greater illiteracy rates among women, low income-generating capacity, and the high maternal mortality rate have been some of the major obstacles to the improvement of their situation.

Bolivian women's participation in the political and economic arenas has, however, significantly improved in recent years, thanks to the relentless efforts of various NGOs. Women's involvement in the workforce has increased from 22.5 percent to 40 percent over the period from 1976 to 1992.

Legal Rights

The Bolivian constitution gives women the right to vote, but many rural and urban women still remain ignorant of their legal rights. Bolivian women also have the right to acquire, hold, transfer, and inherit property according to the civil code 261 of the relevant legislation. Women in rural areas of Bolivia, however, often do not have their birth certificates recorded and are, thus, denied the basic rights to vote or own land.

Traditional social norms also frequently infringe on women's property rights in rural areas by favoring male members of the family.

Women workers earn 30 percent less than men doing the same job, despite minimum wage laws guaranteeing gender equality.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, women have been employed in agriculture and the informal sector. In urban areas, they usually work in sales, education, health care, and private households (as maids, nannies, and housekeepers)

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization has been helping Bolivia's rural women in their traditional enterprises of pottery-making and fish-smoking by introducing new tools and techniques to improve quality, productivity, and income generation potential.

Women held 24 percent of governmental administrative and managerial posts in 1997.

There are not too many well-known businesswomen in Bolivia apart from Maria Claudia Mendez Nogales, founder of the Origenes textile and clothing business.

The growth outlook for women in business doesn't seem too rosy at present, but NGOs are trying to increase women's involvement in business through training and micro-lending activities.

Though Bolivian laws do not bar women from any profession, it prohibits them from working at night. There is also the highly discriminatory Labor Code that restricts the number of female workers to 45 percent of the total staff in businesses (fortunately, this law is rarely enforced).

Women generally dress in suits, skirts, blouses, and other dresses.

Traditionally, women look after the children, even to the extent of taking them along to the workplace while they're cooking, tending crops, or selling goods at marketplaces.

Some working mothers can avail themselves of childcare facilities in Bolivia run by the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging, which partners with local childcare centers to serve the children of relocated miners and helps them with tuition, uniforms, fees, supplies, medical care, and meals.

Women as Business Owners

Legislation does not restrict women from owning businesses, but the lack of access to credit forms the major obstacle to their business aspirations.

Pro Mujer, a micro-financing initiative has been helping Bolivian women to earn a livelihood by starting micro-enterprises. Edith Valdez de Blacutt, for instance, is

successfully running a bakery and small convenience store, which she started, after receiving business training and a small loan from the NGO.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The culture of *machismo* in Bolivia can occasionally create problems for foreign businesswomen. They should be cautious and exercise patience with their male Bolivian counterparts and avoid getting into long-winded argument. Bolivians are warm and friendly people, and they appreciate the same treatment by visitors. Do not discuss contentious issues like the U.S. drug policy and the related military presence in Bolivia.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Bosnian women are slowly emerging from the traditional role of homemakers to find employment outside the home. Their primary responsibility to home and childcare remains, but support from male family members and the fledgling government have helped many to become successful career women. Although women enjoy all civil and political rights according to the present democratic constitution, gender discrimination still exists in education, employment, wages, and healthcare due to the legacy of Islamic and Balkan patriarchal traditions. Many women, however, are now pursuing higher education and obtaining jobs in almost all sectors at the same level as men. Bosnian women are now visible as successful judges, doctors, and professors, and they hold 12.3 percent of the seats in parliament.

The positive transformation of Bosnian women has been aided by many non-governmental organizations and government supported initiatives to heal the scars of war and promote the principles of gender equality and "equal pay for equal work." One of the most prominent of these government efforts for working women was the granting of one year of paid maternity leave and a guaranteed assurance that they could rejoin their jobs.

Women's independence is still under pressure due to poverty and illiteracy. Women who have lost their husbands and other family members in the war are the hardest hit. They have to take care of their children alone, and it becomes even more arduous if they themselves or any of their family members are disabled.

Work attire is typically European. Muslim women do not wear veils, unlike their counterparts in Islamic countries. Women sometimes don a coat or a scarf on religious holidays. Islam is much more leniently followed in Bosnia, and even Muslim women wear short skirts and short-sleeved blouses.

Legal Rights

According to a 2000 U.S. State Department report, Bosnian women do not suffer from much legal or social

discrimination. In fact, Bosnia is a member of the U.N. Convention Against all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, legally guaranteeing women all public and political rights including the right to vote and the right to inherit property. Socially, however, women face problems of domestic violence and domination by men in the family, especially in rural areas.

Bosnian laws give women the right to decide on the birth of children and allow abortions if requests are made within the first ten weeks of pregnancy. Otherwise, permission is granted for therapeutic reasons or in the case of rape, incest, or sexual intercourse with an incompetent person/child. Bosnian women have the right to file for divorce. Women receive custody of the children upon divorce and are also entitled to financial support.

Education

Women in Bosnia have the same rights as men in terms of education and employment. Female adult literacy rate was 91.1 percent, compared to the male adult literacy rate of 98.4 percent in 2003. Youth literacy rate (the female rate as percentage of the male rate) was 100 in the same year. The gender gap is also narrowing in terms of job opportunities. Bosnia has a co-education system, and girls and boys share the same classrooms in schools.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Marriage by choice is the norm in Bosnia. Young people can date and choose their life partners and start dating from the age of 17 or 18. Socializing is very common among young people, who meet in colleges, social gatherings and functions, and through dating agencies. Online dating is also becoming popular. The legal marriageable age is 18, and the mean age of marriage is 23.3 in Bosnia. Ethnically mixed marriages have become very rare since the civil war. Though polygamy is accepted in Islam, very few practice it, and only in one particular region.

Bosnian family names are patronymic. Almost all of them end with the letters "ic." Women's first names generally have an "a" or an "ica" at the end. The ethnical origins of a woman can be determined from the family name.

Women take care of household tasks like cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children. Unemployment since the civil war has kept many rural women at home or in very low-paid jobs where they find work in agricultural and educational sectors. Bosnian men generally do not take up any household tasks.

Bosnia has one of the lowest fertility rates in the world, measured at 1.3 children per woman in 2005. Culturally speaking, it is not considered good if a woman cannot conceive. When it comes to marriage, however, Bosnian women have equal rights in matters of divorce and custody. Divorced women are entitled to receive financial support from their ex-husbands, and avoiding such financial obligation carries criminal penalties.

Health

The healthcare system in Bosnia is more or less socialized. Women have access to good primary healthcare services, and Bosnians are also well informed about general health conditions like diabetes, hypertension, infections, and coronary diseases. Access to sophisticated treatments and procedures, however, is limited for Bosnian women.

Women generally make their own healthcare decisions except in very conservative families where the opinions of the parents or spouses are sought. Women have access to birth control, but family planning as a policy has seen a lot of opposition in Bosnia. Family planning counseling and sex education in schools is not very developed. Abortion is legal in Bosnia, and family planning institutions and associations are set up at all levels; but women below the legal age of consent need the permission of their parents or guardians to terminate pregnancies. Rates of abortion run very high in Bosnia.

Interesting Social Customs

During marriage, the bride's parents gift the couple a specially woven "dowry" rug that has the couple's initials and the wedding date on it.

Women in Business

General View

Bosnian women are slowly emerging from the genocidal civil war that ravaged their country and almost destroyed its social fabric. Women make up half the population, but only 35 percent of them are employed. Furthermore, although they are better educated than men (20% of women have studied in institutions of higher learning, compared to 17% for men), Bosnian women's earnings are only 20 to 50 percent of that of men. Women who were once judges, doctors, and professors are now consigned to their homes or to low-paying jobs.

Laws on gender equality enacted in 2003 entitle women to equal representation in both public and private institutions, and the government has also established a Gender Equality Agency to monitor the proper implementation of the law. In the political field, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe formulated election rules during the 1998 and 2000 elections that require 30 percent of the candidates of all political parties to be women. As Bosnia and Herzegovina prepares itself for the long road to E.U. membership, women's conditions may also change for the better.

Legal Rights

Bosnian women gained the right to vote in 1949. Family laws reflect traditional practices in property and land ownership, and these seldom favor women, considering men the primary owners of land. Bosnians follow the practice of primogeniture in matters of inheritance, so the oldest son receives the property from his father on his death.

Women still routinely experience discrimination in the work place despite recent legislation.

Women in Professions

Bosnian women possess great skills in weaving and knitting, and this is their traditional occupation. Only a few women hold executive positions in Bosnia: Bruna Alexander is the honorary president of UNA, the women entrepreneurs association of Bosnia Herzegovina; Zahida Cosic is an entrepreneur in the textile industry in Zenica; Mira Zvonar owns a marketing agency in Banja Luka; while Alimanovic owns a chain of food shops in Lukavac; and Muska Junuzagic owns a clothing manufacturer.

Bosnian labor laws strictly prohibit gender discrimination in employment, and women are not legally barred from any profession.

Bosnian women generally wear Western style clothing. Some traditional Muslim women wear the *hijab* (headscarf), but rarely the *abaya* (full-length black cloak). Modern, casual Western cloths are the norm for urban professional women.

Women have primary childcare responsibilities and working women generally get childcare assistance from their immediate family members. The absence of affordable childcare prevents many women from seeking employment. The former Communist government of Marshal Tito had encouraged women to work outside the home and had established state-run day care centers for young children, but the devastating civil war has not left this system intact.

Women as Business Owners

Bosnian women own many micro-enterprises in the production and marketing of textiles and crafts.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Bosnians are friendly, affable, and tend to be curious about foreigners. Getting to know your local business associates and developing cordial relationships with them is important. Be aware that local standards of productivity are not necessarily up to international standards yet.

Botswana

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The traditional patriarchal society of Botswana has always regarded women as inferior to men and envisioned them as faithful homemakers. This gender stereotype is summed up by this traditional axiom: *Ga di nke di etelelwa ke manamagadi* (Cattle are never led by a female cow). Traditional prejudices generally prevail over the efforts of the Botswana government to emancipate women and can also be witnessed in media and school materials, which portray women as subservient. Other factors that contribute to the continued economic marginalization of women include the poor economy and limited access to education, credit, and industrial training.

Despite these forces, women have made considerable progress in various economic activities. Amendments of laws unfavorable to women, Western education, and the development of the market economy have all improved women's status in society. Well-educated urban women now often occupy mid-level administrative positions, although they rarely hold the top positions in public or private sectors. Women's participation in politics has also increased since the 1999 elections when several women were elected to the National Assembly. Presently, they hold 25 percent of seats at the permanent secretary level. Their representation in the judiciary includes three female justices on the 13-seat high court and two women in the 15-seat house of chiefs.

Most female business owners are involved in small or micro industries in the fields of knitting and sewing, poultry, food processing, and baking. There are no dress code restrictions for women in Botswana, although generally women dress conservatively. Dress codes vary for organizations, with some companies even allowing informal wear like jeans.

Legal Rights

The Botswana constitution guarantees women equal rights in social, economic, and political spheres, but in reality, societal prejudices often prevent women from exercising their rights. Botswanan women have had the right to vote since 1965 and the right to drive cars. Recently, the government passed a law securing the right to citizenship for foreign-born spouses and their children, which many saw as a victory for women's rights.

Inheritance practices differ according to ethnic group. The majority Tswana group advocates the transmission of property to the eldest son, but, recently, widows and daughters have begun to receive a small portion of the inheritances as well.

Botswanan law prohibits abortion except when a pregnancy is caused by rape. An amendment of the abortion law in 1991 allows women to have abortions if the pregnancy endangers the life of the mother or when a fetus is detected with serious complications or congenital defects. Illegal abortions result in a few hundred deaths every year.

Women have equal rights to initiate divorce on the grounds of infidelity, non-support, and domestic violence. Although a mother receives the custody of children upon divorce, the father continues to serve as the legal guardian of the child.

Education

Botswanan women's fairly good access to education is reflected in their high literacy rate. Interestingly, Botswanan women exceed men in literacy rate (82 percent versus the male rate of 77 percent), as boys often drop out of school to tend their family's cattle. Girls also often drop out of secondary school due to pregnancy. Botswana has a co-educational system, and boys and girls share the same classroom. In spite of their high literacy levels, women do not enjoy equal job opportunities with men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, the bride's family arranged marriages with the consent of the bride. These days, women have more freedom to choose their own partners and meet men at social gatherings, discos, and nightclubs. Botswanan women can legally get married at the age of 18. Customary law allows polygamy (if the first wife permits), but its occurrence is very rare. Generally, women take their husband's name after marriage.

In spite of perceptual changes a man is still considered head of the family in Botswana, and he is considered responsible for his family's needs. There is also a strong cultural belief that a woman's infertility is related to her sins, and this social prejudice is made worse by the fact that children traditionally take care of their parents in old age; so, a childless woman can feel doubly excluded from society.

Upon divorce, mothers usually receive the custody of children, but a father retains legal guardianship. Under traditional law, a married woman remains a legal minor and cannot own, buy, or sell any property without the permission of her husband. In some areas women have authority over immovable property.

Health

In general, Botswanan women have unequal access to the healthcare system. The mediocre healthcare service of Botswana has more negative impact on rural women. The high maternal and infant mortality rates led to the induction of National Sexual and Reproductive Health Program in 2002. The program concentrates on maternal and child health and family planning. Legal provisions permit women to make their own healthcare decisions, but, in reality, they need the consent of fathers or husbands. Despite the societal impediments, the use of contraceptives is comparatively high in Botswana.

Interesting Social Customs

Botswanan people legalize all customary marriages with the payment of *bohadi* or *lobola* (bride price), which usually takes the form of cattle. The payment of *lobola*

symbolically meant the transfer of reproductive rights of the women to her husband.

Women in Business

General View

Botswana follows the patriarchal system of society that treats women as minors and, at best, as housewives. Gender inequality forms the basis of the educational system, which perceives women as responsible for procreation, -childrearing, and domestic tasks. A classic example of this perception is that married women do not qualify for loans from commercial banks without an authorization from the husbands; and, to make matters worse, financial institutions consider women-run businesses as a high-risk informal sector.

Today well-trained urban women have entered into low- and mid-level white-collar jobs as well as senior-level positions in government agencies. The governor of the Bank of Botswana, the attorney general, and the director of public prosecution are all women. Still, there is no corresponding development in the private sector, in which men uniformly hold high positions.

In a recent effort to promote and protect women's rights and welfare, the Women's Affairs Department in the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs has provided US\$240,000 in grants to NGOs.

Legal Rights

In 1965, women won the right to vote. They are also legally entitled to the same civil rights as men, but traditional tribal laws continue to restrict women's property rights and economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas. For instance, there are three systems of marriages, each with its own rules for women's property rights. Generally, a woman married under traditional law is regarded a legal minor and requires her husband's consent to buy or sell property, apply for loan, and to enter into any legal contract. In some cases, married women are given the right to own immovable property in their own names. Botswana law requires that neither spouse can dispose of joint property without the legal consent of the other.

Women earn lower wages as compared to men in both the public and private sectors, according to the Labor Force Survey in Botswana.

Women in Professions

Over three-quarters of women in Botswana work on the land and are technically unpaid. The extent of unpaid labor is often underestimated because much of it takes place away from the fields and farms. Certain jobs have a long history of excluding women from participating, but no professions can legally bar women from entering. Childcare for working mothers is typically handled by older children or extended family members. The government runs a Multi-Purpose Day Care Program, but it is geared exclusively to orphans of pre-school and primary school ages.

Women as Business Owners

Although 75 percent of women who move from rural to urban areas engage in small business, most businesses remain very small. A 1984 report showed that about 94

percent of women-owned enterprises fell into knitting/sewing, poultry, baking, and small-scale food processing.

In Botswana, 39 percent of the women entrepreneurs have no formal education and an additional 53 percent have only attended only primary school. Despite these barriers, a small proportion of independent businesswomen have established enterprises that have shown remarkable growth. Chigedze Chinyepi, managing director and owner of Tjina Nkando Crafts, represents this new breed of businesswomen of Botswana.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

It is important to respect a Botswanan's space, as they generally keep a distance of about an out-stretched arm from each other. They also use regular eye contact to judge a person's trustworthiness. Some gestures – holding the middle finger erect, waving a pointed index finger, and pointing at someone – are considered rude. Public displays of affection may be frowned upon, particularly in rural areas, but are not as out of place in urban settings. Public displays of anger are likely best avoided.

Brazil

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In the Brazilian version of *machismo*, men prove their virility through robust sexual activity (pre-marital, marital, and extra-marital), while women stay chaste until they are married and remain faithful and uncomplaining during the marriage, regardless of the activities of their philandering husbands. The father is head of the family, but the mother has her sphere of influence in the home.

Machismo and strong patriarchal leanings notwithstanding, women's contribution to the economy has gone up by nearly 70 percent, and many women with university educations are pursuing careers in all sectors. These include the armed forces, science and technology, and financial services. World Bank data also presents a positive image of women's development in Brazil with increases in life expectancy, a drop in the birth rate, and a decline in female illiteracy rates over the last two decades. The gap between haves and have-nots is pronounced in Brazil, so urban middle- and upper-class women have a dramatically higher status than their rural counterparts.

Female political participation in Brazil is also steadily growing. Ten of the 81-member Senate and 45 of the 513-seat Chamber of Deputies are women. There is also one female cabinet minister and a handful of mayors and governors in Brazil, averaging women's share at all governmental levels at 11.4 percent. Brazilian women represent nearly 21 percent of the legal profession, including one Supreme Court justice, 46 percent of legal aid attorneys, and 20 percent of public prosecutors. In business, women comprise 46 percent of all entrepreneurs in Brazil. There are also a significant number of Brazilian women doctors (38 percent).

Brazilian rural women have limited access to education and employment opportunities, credit facilities, social security benefits, and technical training, and thereby suffer from poor economic status.

Brazilian women dress freely in Western style clothing but restrict themselves from wearing the colors of the Brazilian flag (green and yellow).

Legal Rights

The Constitution grants equal rights to Brazilian men and women and prohibits gender discrimination. Brazil gave women the right to vote and contest in elections in 1934. Women also have the right to drive vehicles and the right to own and inherit property.

Abortion is legally prohibited in Brazil. However, it is allowed in certain circumstances like rape and to save the pregnant woman's life. The debate on liberalizing the abortion laws and on specific laws against domestic violence is still continuing.

Brazilian women have the right to initiate divorces on many grounds, including adultery, cruel treatment, violation of marital duties, and mutual consent. The couple can mutually agree on the custody of children or accept a judicial decision for joint or individual custody.

Brazil is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, but the Parliament has not ratified it and women's groups are demanding full compliance in order to strengthen women's rights.

Education

Brazil offers free and compulsory primary education for all children aged 7 to 14. Education is free at all levels, and both coeducational and single-sex schools exist. The female net enrollment ratio at all levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary) is considerably better than the male ratio. About 56 percent of college students are girls.

The adult literacy rate for women age 15 and over is on a par with the rate for men – 88.6 percent– and the female youth literacy rate is 97.7 percent, 2 percent higher than for men. Such significant female literacy rates and educational levels contrast with the high rate of male children entering the labor market and dropping out of schools in Brazil.

Many urban and rural Brazilian women are entering the job market, and the wage gap between the genders is also decreasing.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Brazilian men and women are free to choose their partners, although arranged marriages also occur. Girls and boys practice dating from their teens, and they normally meet in educational and social settings. Sexual activity (non-coital or coital) is common during dating, and serious courting may last for two or three years.

The marriageable age is 18 years in Brazil, but the median age for a first marriage is 22.7 years for women and 25.8 years for men. Polygamy is illegal in Brazil, although cohabitation is a growing tendency among young people.

Traditionally, Brazilian women are responsible for the household activities, while men are the primary breadwinners of the family. According a survey, women head 26 percent of all households in Brazil, and in several provincial areas, women head 30 to 40 percent of the households. According to civil laws, Brazilian women have the right to hold assets separate from their husbands.

With modernization and better education, childlessness in Brazilian women doesn't appear to have much stigma attached to it.

Brazilian women mostly add their husband's family name after marriage, and the children take their father's family name. In a divorce, a woman has the right to retain or remove the husband's name.

In divorce cases, child custody is granted to the parent perceived by the courts to be best suited to raise children. Statistics indicate that child custody is granted to women only in one out of every five divorces.

Health

The Brazilian government sponsors equal and free access to public and/or private healthcare under the

Single Health System to all citizens. Maternal care, sex education, family planning, and information on health hazards are provided to Brazilian women. However, the maternal mortality rate is as high as 260 per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is 28 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Most Brazilian women make their own healthcare decisions, including family planning, child control, and contraceptive use. As a result, nearly 77 percent of women use contraception, 40 percent sterilization (16 percent of all women), and 21 percent oral contraceptives. Abortion is only allowed with the approval of a registered physician and under highly specific circumstances.

Interesting Social Customs

The Brazilian Carnival is held annually to mark the beginning of Lent. In this celebration, Brazilian women clad in skimpy costumes engage in voluptuous dancing and revelry to say farewell to carnal pleasures before the fasting season begins.

Women in Business

General View

Brazilian women comprise 35 percent of the country's labor force with the majority, almost three quarters of the workforce, involved in the service sector. Agriculture and industry are the next largest areas of employment with 20 and 10 percent respectively

Economic disadvantages and lack of opportunity still impede the progress of poor and rural women in the workforce, causing most of them to pursue teaching, secretarial, and nursing careers despite unattractive remuneration for these jobs. In general, women are more likely to perform lower-profile jobs, often despite higher educational credentials than male employees, and to take part-time jobs due to family obligations. Their high participation rate in informal sectors has the unfortunate consequence of denying women social security benefits.

The government sector provides equal openings to women and men and, although not yet a force to be reckoned with, women are making some progress toward top decision-making positions.

Class and racial legacies also still affect employment patterns in Brazil, and lighterskinned women are more likely to occupy administrative positions while those of darker hue are more likely to hold menial jobs.

Legal Rights

Brazilian women have an equal legal status to that of men but are still struggling to make that guarantee a reality. Until 1988, for instance, females couldn't travel with their children across state lines without their husband's consent. Women have the right to vote (granted in 1932) and to own and inherit property left behind by their spouses or legal companions.

The government, due to persistent political pressure, has taken steps to support the legal provisions made to safeguard women. The private sector has also taken steps to ensure greater female participation to the extent that 69 percent of companies now have women in various positions on their boards. Chemical company Copesul

leads the pack in this regard with three female directors out of seven on its board.

On the downside, there are still substantial inequalities in salaries between the genders. A white Brazilian woman's earning is 40 percent less than her male counterpart, and an Afro-Brazilian woman's earning is 60 percent less than her male counterpart. The situation remains worse in rural areas.

Women in Professions

Recently, new opportunities have opened up in information technology, and more women are now occupying executive positions (although gains are often confined to women from the upper classes). Also, despite persistent gender bias, now there is a fairer representation of women in engineering, medicine, and law.

Out of 6,016 female senior executives there are nearly 500 women holding top executive posts in Brazil (only 372 of the 6,016 executives are of African origin).

There are prominent women leaders in Brazil in all areas: Ellen Gracie is one of the eleven Justices of the Supreme Court; Carla Cico is president and CEO of Brasil Telecom; and Zilda Arns heads a group of 145,000 volunteers engaged in programs to reduce infant mortality and malnutrition for the National Council of Bishops in Brazil.

Women can legally hold any type of job, and there are no dress code restrictions for Brazilian women. Women dress casually (and even revealingly) at informal occasions, but in business settings they tend to dress in a relatively conservative European style.

Most Brazilian women are mothers and homemakers and daycare for working women is often handled by relatives or daycare centers run by Christian organizations and NGOs.

Women as Business Owners

Women run 46 percent of Brazilian small enterprises (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2004), and these are generally small retail and manufacturing establishments and cooperatives, although a significant 23 percent are engaged in international trade. Non-profit organizations like Business and Professional Women of Brazil provide support to prospective Brazilian female entrepreneurs, whose ranks are growing.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign women will encounter a welcoming business ambience even in the presence of *machismo*. Brazilians prefer to establish a rapport through personal meetings rather than written communications and will be even more comfortable if you have a local representative in the country, a lawyer for instance, representing your interests. Brazilian men may identify women with the secretarial cadre or as sexual objects, so it is necessary to assert your standing in a firm but modest way. Beware of constant eye contact, which could be misinterpreted as a sexual overture. Take a friend with you if you are invited to an informal dinner, and generally strike a careful balance between being professional and feminine.

Brunei

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Brunei is a wealthy, ethnically diverse, and socially progressive Muslim country. Even though Bruneian women are generally bound by Muslim laws and customs, they play an active role in education, the economy, and society. Women now make up almost 50 percent of the labor force and participate in higher education at virtually the same level as men. More and more women are entering professions like law and medicine and are moving into decision-making positions as directors, ambassadors, and heads of companies.

Women's participation in the public sector is also significant (the country's highest judicial position is held by a woman), but is hampered by the facts that women must have higher qualifications than men for the same position and are rarely promoted to higher levels of management. The Brunei government has, however, introduced amendments to laws relating to married women and families in order to give more rights and employment opportunities to women, especially non-Muslim women.

The role of women in Brunei society also depends on their ethnicity. Chinese, Indians, and other Asians in Brunei each have their own cultural attitudes towards the role of women in the family and the society as a whole. The majority of Bruneian women live in urban areas, where there are more opportunities for education and professional advancement.

Although traditional conservative Muslim dress is encouraged in women and sometimes mandatory for Muslim women at certain institutions, it is not forced on non-Muslim women. Muslim women usually wear a long-sleeve blouse, slacks, and a headscarf, or *tudung*, at work, at school, and in public.

Legal Rights

Because Brunei does not have an elected legislature, neither women nor men can vote or contest elections. Women do, however, have the right to own and manage property. Inheritance laws for Muslim women are enumerated in the Islamic Family Law of 1989. The laws favor male children and relatives over wives and daughters.

Abortion is prohibited under the Penal Code of Brunei Darussalam. It is allowed only to save the woman's life. Family planning is not a part of the health services provided by the state. Spacing between the births can, however, be decided by the parents.

Women can initiate divorce, but it is a lengthy and complicated process when compared to the procedure for men. The woman has to apply for divorce with the *Kathi*, who will register it if the husband gives consent. If the husband doesn't accept, the *Kathi* will then propose an agreement called *cherai tebus talak* or appoint arbitrators who can order divorce. Divorced women are eligible for maintenance from the husband. Brunei's courts have traditionally discouraged divorce in domestic violence cases, although religious authorities now recognize wife-beating as grounds for divorce and some courts are

moving away from encouraging wives to reconcile with their abusive husbands.

Legislation like the Emergency Order (for married women) and the Guardianship of Infants Order, introduced in 1999, benefits married women and their children who are not protected by the Family Law. Women are also protected by strong laws against sexual exploitation and other crimes.

Polygamy is allowed and is regulated by Islamic law. Men can have up to four wives. Child custody, succession, and other matters are governed by secular law.

Women cannot pass on their nationality to their children if they mother a child with a foreigner. A Bruneian man's nationality, however, passes to the children of a relationship with a non-Bruneian woman.

Education

Education is free for everyone in Brunei, and the literacy rate for women is almost the same as that of men, at 91.4 percent and 96.3 percent respectively. Women now participate in higher education at a greater rate than the men in some institutions. There are single-gender schools as well as co-educational schools in Brunei.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, parents or other family members arranged marriages, a practice still in vogue in traditional families. If a man wants to marry a particular woman, his family members go to the girl's house and ask her parents for her hand in marriage. If the offer is accepted, the dowry and other issues are discussed before a formal engagement is announced. Bruneians of Chinese and Indian origin may also arrange marriages. Marriages are generally within an ethnic group, although interethnic marriages are also becoming common.

Dating is not technically allowed in Brunei, as in other Muslim countries. There are, however, dating websites through which young people meet. Youngsters also meet in social and religious gatherings.

Taking care of the family and having children remains a Bruneian woman's primary responsibility. It is the husband's responsibility to maintain his wife and children and, in fact, husbands who fail to do so may face penalty, imprisonment, and confiscation of their salary. Married women are not required to change their surname after marriage, and many use both names.

Health

The Brunei government provides free and equal access to healthcare services for all citizens. Services are provided through several hospitals, health centers and clinics, as well as the Flying Medical Services in remote areas. Women are granted special preventive and promotive healthcare programs for motherhood and reproductive health. The result of Brunei's substantial investment in healthcare is high life expectancy for women (over 76 years) and a declining infant mortality rate.

Women can make only limited healthcare decisions. Abortion and birth control is allowed only in rare cases.

Women in Business

General View

Women have an enviably high status in the Islamic nation of Brunei Darussalam. A high level of education, added to a general labor shortage in all sectors of the economy, has ensured abundant employment opportunities for women. Bruneian women hold executive or professional positions in education, medicine, law, research, information technology, print and electronic media, and the armed forces (in non-combat roles). Easy access to education was a major force in increasing the female working population from 22.6 percent in 1981 to 46.3 percent today. Women are also making their presence felt in national and international companies as directors, managers, and proprietors. The Bruneian government also actively promotes women entrepreneurs.

Legal Rights

Brunei is an absolute monarchy and, since there is no elected legislature, there are no voting rights for either men or women. As per Islamic tradition, Bruneian women do not have equal rights in areas such as divorce, inheritance, and custody of children. However, in 1999, provisions relating to women's rights in marriage and divorce were amended to enhance women's marital rights.

Bruneian women are not allowed to transmit their citizenship and nationality to their children from foreign husbands, even when the children are born in the country. They are also not allowed to own property and business assets.

No pay differences exist between men and women in Brunei. Women without university degrees and those who work on a month-to-month basis in government jobs are, however, generally paid less.

Women in Professions

The occupational categories of teaching, nursing, and secretarial or clerical posts used to be the traditional choice for Bruneian women. Government support for female education has since opened up the doors for women to enter professional and technical sectors, increasingly in managerial and executive posts.

Datin Hj Edah Hj Mohd Noor and Datin Maimuna Hj C.A. Mohamad, president and vice president of the Women's Business Council respectively, are two of the most well-known women business executives in Brunei.

The growth outlook for Brunei businesswomen is very encouraging, with the government and the influential Women's Business Council vigorously working for their advancement. Women are not barred from any profession, except combat roles in the armed forces.

The Islamic dress code requires women to wear their traditional head covering or *tudong*. Professional women may wear modest pantsuits or full-sleeved blouses with high necklines and long skirts.

The Brunei Ministry of Health provides early-childhood care for infants and young children through a national network of maternal and child health clinics, and, since 1999, through a Child Development Center in the capital city.

Government pre-school programs exist, but two-thirds of pre-schoolers go to private institutions. Grandparents and other relatives also take care of the children of working mothers.

Women as Business Owners

Out of 683 businesses set up in the year 2001, 52 percent of these belonged to or were run by women. The government also offers incentives to Bruneian women (along with men) to encourage them to launch small and medium enterprises in high-tech and knowledge industries.

Women own businesses in diverse categories such as computing, cybercafés, electrical and electronic equipment, garments, jewelry, restaurants, cinemas, and courier services. A significant social shift in attitudes towards working women has also contributed to their achievements in this sector.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The people of Brunei are social and friendly by nature. The men, although wary of visiting businesswomen, are courteous and polite. Always address your Bruneian counterparts (men or women) by the title specified in the letterhead or business card. Since women normally wear loose, full-length clothes, loose trousers and shirts or long skirts with shirts/high neck blouses are recommended attire for visiting businesswomen. Since it is customary for the people of Brunei to eat with their hands, it is considered good taste to follow suit instead of insisting on cutlery. If seats are offered on the floor, women are expected to sit with legs tucked to one side.

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Bulgaria

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditionally, Bulgarian society is patriarchal and based on the *zadruga*, a large family or clan organized on a patrilineal basis. Women had influence over the household and participated in agricultural decision-making but remained obediently subservient to the men of the family.

The socialist government did much to enhance women's access to equal job opportunities, but generally women still occupied low-paid and low-status jobs and rarely held high positions in the economic sector. The transformation from communism to democracy and market economy has been an overwhelming experience for Bulgarian women. Bulgarian academics have used the terms "mass impoverishment" and the "feminization of poverty in Bulgaria" to describe the wretched condition in which many Bulgarian women found themselves during the post-communist transition period.

Bulgarian women, however, are no strangers to hardship, and statistics reveal that 55 percent of women now participate in the labor force and some hold important positions in the new government. Generally speaking, it is the more educated urban women who have had a distinct advantage over rural women in terms of access to opportunities and professional success.

The transition period and the attendant political and economic instability have appeared to have hindered the involvement of women in politics. After much struggle and contention, however, Bulgarian women have made inroads into the judiciary and the legal profession. Unfortunately, women from the Turkish ethnic minority have faced racial discrimination in the workplace and the community, sometimes even preventing them from accessing education and proper medical care.

Bulgarian women do not face dress code restrictions, and they have a reputation for dressing elegantly, even under adverse circumstances.

Legal Rights

The revised socialist constitution of Bulgaria proclaimed the equality of men and women in 1971. Bulgarian women gained the right to vote in 1944, during the communist period. Women have the right to drive cars at the age of 18. The family code of 1985 supports equality of men and women in inheritance rights, but traditional factors inhibit many of them from effectively exercising those rights.

The right to abortion was restructured in 1957, enabling women to obtain abortions under certain conditions. The paucity of birth control techniques has resulted in an increase in the number of abortions in Bulgaria. In the event of marital discord, women have the right to initiate divorce under the Bulgarian Code of Civil Procedure. The courts decide the custody of minor children, regardless of the claims made by the parents.

Education

Bulgarian women have equal access to education, and the literacy rates of men and women are approximately the same (98.6 percent). The educational system includes four years of primary schooling, three years of basic education, and five years of secondary education. Many girls drop out from secondary schools for reasons of marriage. Presently, nearly 60 percent of women enroll in universities. Bulgarian boys and girls share the same classroom space in co-educational institutions. Bulgaria also has separate schools for boys and girls.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In traditional Bulgaria, parents usually arranged marriages with the consent of the concerned parties. At present, couples generally make their own marriage decisions. Dating is practiced in Bulgaria, especially in groups. Individual dating usually take place when boys and girls reach the age of 20. Women usually meet men in social gatherings, work place, colleges, or with the help of online dating sites and dating agencies.

Bulgarian women can legally get married at the age of 18. Generally, they marry in their late teens or early twenties; but they can also get married at the age of 16 with the approval of the court. Though polygamy was practiced in some tribes in the old days, the present legislation prohibits it.

Women take up their husband's names after marriage and relinquish it upon divorce. They also have the right to hold and dispose of assets separate from, and independent of, their husbands. While women take the responsibility for all domestic work, men act as head of family and make all major decisions. Spinsters and childless women have traditionally faced society's disapproval.

Health

Bulgarian women have equal access to healthcare services, and pregnant women receive special attention from the healthcare system, which has brought a decrease in the rates of maternal and infant mortality. Women have the right to make all their own healthcare decisions.

During the socialist era, couples adopted a two-child norm. Nowadays economic difficulties have forced many couples to have just one child, making the use of contraceptives imperative. Modernization and education coupled with a more liberated lifestyle has also increased the usage of contraceptives among many young Bulgarian women.

Women in Business

General View

In Bulgaria, women generally enjoy the same freedoms as men. The average Bulgarian woman is well educated, married, has children and the strong support of her family. Traditionally, Bulgarian families were patriarchal, and

women played subordinate roles with little economic and social freedom. Subsequent Communist and capitalist regimes ensured women's equality and freedom to work and earn their own livings. The status of women continues to improve in Bulgaria as the country becomes more open, modern, industrialized, and urban; and Bulgarian women are gradually becoming successful in many fields once dominated by men, such as politics, science, and business. Bulgarian women play the role of the informal head of the family responsible for taking care of the family and children. They are increasingly eager to set up their own businesses due to the financial and social freedom it gives.

Legal Rights

Bulgarian women obtained the right to vote in 1944, and women in Bulgaria have the right to own and inherit property. In 1971, the constitution of Bulgaria adopted the declaration that all men and women have the same rights and are equal before law. The Bulgarian Family Code (adopted in 1985) ensures equal rights for men and women in family matters. Section 243 of the Labor Code states that both men and women have the right to equal pay for the same work. In spite of this, the average pay of women in Bulgaria is still only 72 to 80 percent of the average earnings of men. Women occupy one-third of all leadership positions in Bulgaria, and it seems that a lingering belief that women do not have the strength to run private enterprises which involve high risks and obstacles may be the reason they are not selected for the top managerial positions in the country, in spite of their high qualifications.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Bulgarian women have been employed in agriculture, textile production, and the food and tobacco production industries. They are generally employed in low-paying occupations, such as technical staff (75.5%), retail trade and services (64.1%), and clerical and administrative staff (56.1%). Large numbers of women are also employed in manufacturing, wholesale and retail sales, hotels and restaurants, education, health care, and social work.

Few Bulgarian women hold top managerial positions, but a couple of notable women businesspeople include Mila Ivanova Zlatova, owner of Mildex Limited, and Sasha Bezuhanova, the general manager for HP Bulgaria. Prominent women involved in promoting the role of businesswomen include Nina Noeva, president of the International Association of Professional and Business Women in Bulgaria; J. Maleeva Berberian, former president of the Bulgarian Women's Union; and Antonina Stoyanovska, director of the Foundation for Entrepreneurship Development.

The outlook for Bulgarian businesswomen appears bright in the light of the expansion of the market economy and prospective membership in the E.U. Only those jobs that require acute physical strain and which cause health problems, like working in mines, are prohibited for women in Bulgaria.

There are no dress code restrictions for Bulgarian women. Businesswomen usually wear suits or dresses and have a reputation for dressing elegantly.

In Bulgaria, the government runs a network of pre-school and childcare institutions. Professional daycare centers

and babysitters are also available to take care of the children of working mothers. In extended families, grandparents take care of children. Fathers are also allowed by law to take leave to take care of their children.

Women as Business Owners

Bulgarian women entrepreneurs typically run businesses that are connected with the tourism sector and the clothing and footwear industry. Women business owners are also active in communication technology, IT services, and the manufacture of chocolates, essential oils, natural aromatic products, wooden toys, perfumes, cosmetics, and pharmaceutical products.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen can expect Bulgarians to treat them with respect and cordiality, as Bulgarians are a very hospitable people, always courteous and polite to foreigners. Visiting businesswomen are well-advised to hire interpreters, as few Bulgarians have fluency in English. It is necessary to have patience while doing business with Bulgarians, as business negotiations proceed very slowly. In Bulgaria, a rocking of the head from left to right with a slight smile indicates "yes," while nodding up and down indicates "no."

Burkina Faso

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The role of women in Burkina Faso's society is to be submissive and subordinate to men. Poverty and the persistence of traditional laws have kept women dependent on their male family members. The position of women is nevertheless changing, albeit gradually, due to government initiatives to promote women's rights.

Women are poorly represented in politics, with just 12 women in the 111-seat National Assembly. In the Cabinet, three of 31 members are women. Three provinces in Burkina Faso have women holding the posts of provincial high commissioners. Women make up about 20 percent of the healthcare force, with most of them working as nurses, midwives, and administrative personnel. Burkinabe women are poorly represented in the business sector, with a few of them operating small-scale businesses in the agricultural sector.

There are over 60 different ethnic groups in Burkina Faso, each following their own traditional customs and laws. About 85 percent of Burkina Faso's population lives in rural areas, where access to employment, education, and healthcare facilities are limited in comparison with urban areas. Urban women are comparatively better off than rural women socially and economically.

Burkinabe women dress modestly following the traditional ethnic and Islamic customs and practices. Visitors should dress casually in decent, formal dresses. Shorts and short skirts should be avoided.

Legal Rights

According to the Burkina Faso Constitution, women are entitled to all the legal rights that men enjoy. Discrimination against women in any form is prohibited in matters relating to marriage, employment, wages, inheritance, and property rights. Traditional customary laws, however, hold sway over civil laws, especially in the rural areas where over 80 percent of the population is concentrated.

Burkinabe women were granted the right to vote in 1958. They have the right to own and inherit land. Abortion is illegal in Burkina Faso, except when there is danger to the mother's life, the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest, or the fetus has severe abnormalities.

Women have the right to initiate divorce proceedings. The courts usually make the final decision with regard to granting custody of the children to either spouse.

Education

Although the law grants women equal access to education, few families send their girls to school due to chronic poverty and traditional stereotypes. Only 34 percent of Burkinabe girls have access to schools, making their literacy level of 16 percent among the lowest in the world. The proportion of girls at the primary level is around 30 percent, and it is even lower at the secondary levels because of high dropout rates.

Women make up about 45 percent of the workforce and can be found employed in many sectors, but mostly in the lower rungs of the employment ladder.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Although arranged marriages were traditionally the norm, they are being replaced by the culture of people choosing their own spouses, especially in the urban areas. Coercing young girls into marriage still occurs in some parts. Although there is no formal dating culture, pre-marital relations exist. Young people meet at social gatherings.

The legal marriageable age of Burkinabe girls is 17 years, although many of them get married much before that, some as early as 12 years old. Burkinabe women take their husband's names after marriage.

Having multiple wives and many children is a sign of affluence and higher social status. Polygamy is practiced by almost one-third of households, although the law states that a man can have a polygamous marriage only through a formal consent agreement with his first wife.

Women can legally own and inherit property, although traditional customary laws dictate otherwise. Childless women are heavily stigmatized and can be sent away from the house without any support whatsoever.

In the event of a divorce, the wife, if in dire need of support, is eligible for a food allowance that is not more than a quarter of her husband's income. If, however, the divorce is the wife's fault, she is not entitled to this support, except in cases when depriving her of support would be extremely inequitable. The custody of children below seven years of age is usually granted to the mother, although the father can apply for custody if he is able to show that it would be in the child's best interests.

Health

Healthcare services in Burkina Faso are almost non-existent. Those that exist serve the more affluent citizens, as poor people cannot afford modern medical services. The practice of traditional indigenous medicine is still very popular. While trained medical personnel are present to supervise about 92 percent of all births in the urban areas, they are present at only 25.5 percent of rural births. About 8 percent of rural births were unattended completely. The infant mortality rate is about 96 per 1,000 live births.

Most Burkinabe women depend upon their male family members to make their healthcare decisions. Contraceptives are available in Burkina Faso, but only about 12 percent of rural women and 38 percent of urban women use them. This can be attributed to general lack of awareness and traditional Islamic reservations about using birth control methods.

Interesting Social Customs

If a divorced woman remarries, her husband's family receives the bride price.

Women in Business

General View

The women of Burkina Faso have traditionally fulfilled the duties of taking care of the household, bringing up the children, working on the farms, and selling the produce of their husbands' lands. More than 95 percent of women are engaged in subsistence farming and fishing. Their other activities include gathering wood, selling mangoes, and picking *shea* seeds (used for food and the making of soaps and candles). The businesses Burkinabe women are most involved in are usually related to agriculture, agricultural products, and the processing of commodities. The dearth of Burkinabe women in the business sector is due to poverty, traditional socio-cultural customs, lack of educational opportunity, discrimination, and the lack of credit facilities.

The status of Burkinabe women in society is slowly changing. This change is reflected in the fact that women represent about 45 percent of Burkina Faso's workforce. Women also hold one-fourth of the government jobs, though they are mostly relegated to the lower levels of administration. The government has launched a number of programs to increase women's participation in various social and economic areas of society. Income generating activities promoted for Burkinabe women include the production of *shea* butter, fabric, and soap.

To address the problem of Burkinabe women's lack of access to commercial credit, the government has also set up the Fund for Support to Women's Income Generating Activities and The National Agricultural Credit Bank. These and a number of NGOs and People's Credit Unions extend credit facilities to Burkinabe women.

Legal Rights

The government granted Burkinabe women the right to vote in 1958. The Constitution of Burkina Faso guarantees equal rights and freedoms to men and women. Statutory laws, however, rarely have the power to supplant the traditional customary laws that hold sway in most areas of Burkina Faso. According to traditional law, the right to own property is restricted to men, and it is the man's family that takes possession of property when he dies. In contrast, the civil law allows a woman to inherit her husband's property after his death.

The Constitution of Burkina Faso prohibits discrimination in pay on the basis of gender. In reality, however, Burkinabe women are paid lower salaries than the men for doing the same job.

Women in Professions

Burkinabe women have traditionally been involved almost entirely in the agricultural sector, with more than 95 percent of the rural women engaged in subsistence farming. Most income generation by Burkinabe women comes from selling agricultural produce, agricultural-related products, or other primary commodities in the local market. In the formal sector, women usually occupy low-level service jobs.

Burkinabe women face discrimination in the workplace that prevents them from reaching executive positions in companies. Though women represent a healthy 45 percent of the workforce and make up one-fourth of the

government workforce, very few female heads of companies exist in Burkina Faso.

One prominent example of a Burkinabe businesswoman is Hadja Alizéta Ouédraogo, the president of Group TAN-ALIZ and vice president of the Burkina Faso Chamber of Commerce.

The government and several NGOs have launched various initiatives aimed at empowering women to start their own self-help groups and contribute to the business sector. Other initiatives are targeted at entire communities of Burkinabe women, with the aim of increasing literacy rates and providing greater access to employment and credit facilities.

The Constitution of Burkina Faso provides women with the right to work in any profession of their choice. There is no dress code restriction that prevents women from working in certain professions, though women are expected to dress modestly in keeping with Burkina Faso's Muslim dominance.

Older siblings or other relatives usually look after children of working mothers. The government has set up a few daycare centers, but financial constraints have prevented these daycare centers from functioning effectively. Programs in the rural areas also seek to organize the care of children on a seasonal basis.

Women as Business Owners

Burkinabe women have to contend with various obstacles like poverty, illiteracy, and the lack of basic infrastructure and amenities on a daily basis. Despite this, a few women have managed to own and operate businesses. Women-run businesses are mainly in the agricultural sector and in the marketing of agriculture-related products. Burkinabe women sell fruits and vegetables, and they produce *shea* butter, beer, pastries, and fabric.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Burkina Faso is a male-dominated society. The concept of gender equality is almost non-existent, though things are changing very slowly.

Men and women in Burkina Faso are usually wary of foreigners at the beginning of any relationship, so it is advisable to act through an intermediary and to remain formal in your dealings, at first. Business in Burkina Faso depends to a large extent on trust and the development of personal relationships, which may take time. Burkinabe men and women place a lot of emphasis on physical appearance and clothing. Burkinabe women give much importance to haircuts, jewelry, and other accessories. Foreign women are advised to be conservative in their dress and manners.

Burundi

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Burundian men are unequivocally the heads of their households, and women traditionally occupy only a supporting role in society. Men make all decisions concerning the household, including those relating to money, children, and their wives; women cook, clean, and take care of the family's children, the elderly, and the sick. Domestic violence is also a widespread problem for women in Burundi. The situation has taken a turn for the worse due to war and fighting, which has meant displacement, murder, rape, slavery, and greater poverty for Burundian women. Burundian women from the privileged social and economic sections of society receive better education, employment opportunities and receive better treatment than their counterparts from the lower classes.

Burundian society is slowly changing, with the government bringing in a number of statutory laws and provisions for the empowerment of women. The Burundian government is trying to increase women's participation in economic and social fields by establishing various development projects to increase women's access to education, employment, and training in various skills. The government has also tried to modify traditional social and cultural practices by introducing policies and projects to increase women's awareness of their role in society. Criminal laws have been amended to prevent prostitution and provide for stringent legal action for indecent acts against women, including rape.

Despite reserving 30 percent of the National Assembly and Senate seats for women, they are not adequately represented in Burundian politics. The 118-seat National Assembly consists of 37 women, and the 49 seat Senate has 17 women. Women hold seven of the 20 ministerial seats. The situation is similar in the judiciary, with women making up 142, or 16.9 percent, of the 838 judges in the entire Burundian judicial system. There are two women in the 11-member Supreme Court and three in the 7-member Constitutional Court.

Women are almost totally unrepresented in business. Quite a few of them work as nurses in hospitals and clinics, though most doctors and physicians are men. With recent changes in attitudes, urban women have better employment and economic opportunities, not to mention better access to education and healthcare.

Burundian women usually dress in traditional and conservative attire, although Western fashion has been adopted in urban areas.

Legal Rights

The Burundian Constitution provides women with equal rights in all respects and forbids discrimination against them in any form. Burundian women were granted the right to vote in 1961. Although the Constitution allows Burundian women to own property, in reality, inheritance of property is governed by social and cultural customs, which are highly discriminatory towards women.

Divorce is quite common in Burundian society, though women initiating divorces remains quite rare. Women are granted custodial rights to children, although older boys often stay with their fathers. Abortion is prohibited in Burundi except in order to save the life of the mother, or to prevent serious and permanent damage to her health. However, even in such cases, two doctors must approve the abortion.

Education

Burundian women, especially those living in rural areas, have very limited access to education. Even when they do have access, the school enrolment rates of Burundian women are lower than men, and they have a correspondingly low adult literacy rate of 52 percent, against men's 67 percent. With most Burundian girls expected to get married sooner rather than later, they do not receive much education. Most girls do go to school, though many do not pass the sixth grade to get one the few places available for secondary level education. Burundian boys and girls share the same classroom space.

Like in most areas of society, Burundian women are under-represented in the economic sector as well. Women are poorly represented in mid- and top-level managerial and decision-making posts, making up only 16 percent of administrative and managerial posts and 44 percent of professional and technical positions.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In line with traditional practices, parents usually find spouses for their children. Dating is not encouraged, but pre-marital sex among teenagers does take place, although on a limited scale. The legal age for women to get married in Burundi is 18. Marriages between people below the legal age can, however, be performed with the consent of parents and the governor of the province (who can waive age restrictions for serious, valid reasons). Married women take their husband's names after marriage and drop it in the event of divorce.

Polygamy is illegal according to the provisions of civil law and strongly discouraged by Christian churches but people still practice it in many areas of Burundi. Practiced traditionally, polygamy has only recently been outlawed and hence does not affect polygamous marriages that were contracted to prior to the promulgation of the new law.

The status of Burundian women is often determined by the number of children, especially boys, they produce. Being childless is considered very bad for Burundian women. The custody of young children is usually granted to the woman in the event of a divorce, although the father may expect the boys to return to him after they are old enough to leave their mother.

Health

Most Burundians, irrespective of gender, do not have access to healthcare services, no matter how basic. Medical services in Burundi suffer due to a chronic shortage of funds and medicines. Though the situation is

slowly improving, thanks to the efforts of various national and international non-governmental organizations, a lot still needs to be done to make healthcare accessible to women in various parts of the country.

Though only eight percent of Burundi's population lives in the cities, it contains 66 percent of Burundi's medical personnel. More than 80 percent of Burundian women give birth at home, in spite of the risks involved. Burundi's maternal mortality rate stands at 826 deaths per 100,000 live births. The infant mortality rate is 63.13 deaths per 1,000 live births. Burundi's life expectancy is also one of the lowest in the world – 47 years for women and 45 years for men.

Burundian women are usually not permitted to make their own healthcare decisions, the male head of the household retains that power. Birth control measures and contraceptive use is very limited but is slowly showing a positive trend, thanks to increased awareness among Burundian women. The government has set up family planning centers, and they have played a big role in educating women about various birth control methods. However, the Catholic Church disapproves of the use of contraceptives, and this attitude continues to serve as a stumbling block for wider usage.

Interesting Social Customs

Almost all Burundian greetings and exchanges begin with a literal or figurative reference to cattle. For example, a typical Burundian greeting would begin with both parties wishing each other large herds of cattle. Different areas of the country practice different types of handshakes. People may also continue holding hands for several minutes after shaking hands.

Cows are considered sacred, and milk cannot be heated, boiled, or drunk on the same day that peas and peanuts are consumed. Widows are considered the ward of the husband's brother, and if he doesn't marry her after her husband's death, she usually returns to her maiden home.

Women in Business

General View

The role of women in the business and economic sectors of Burundi is very limited. This has largely to do with the fact that social and cultural customs inhibit women from getting jobs or starting businesses. According to Burundian culture, a man is granted unopposed status as the head of the house, and it is he who makes the final decision regarding whether his wife ventures outside of the home.

Burundian women are responsible for taking care of the family and performing various household chores. The few businesses that women run belong mainly in the agricultural sector and are limited to the informal or unregulated part of the Burundian economy.

A concerted effort is being made to end discrimination against Burundian women, with the help and involvement of agencies like the E.U., World Bank, and The U.N. Economic Commission for Africa. The government has also taken various steps to encourage women to join the market economy by starting their own businesses. Despite these measures, various facilities like credit are still difficult for women to obtain.

Legal Rights

The constitution of Burundi provides women with equal legal rights as men in all aspects of life. Burundian women were granted the right to vote in 1961. They can also run for election, and some of them currently serve in the National Assembly and the Senate.

The Burundian constitution also grants women the right to own and inherit property. However, it is local customs, rather than the constitution, that holds sway over large parts of Burundi. These customs discriminate heavily against women, prohibiting them from inheriting or owning land. Women are not allowed to inherit property from either their fathers or husbands, and they also do not have ownership over what they produce.

According to Burundian law, it is a punishable offence to discriminate against women in any respect, including pay. The reality, however, is that women are paid much lower than men for doing the same job.

Women in Professions

With about 92 percent of Burundi's population living in rural areas, it comes as no surprise that the vast majority of women work as agricultural laborers. Women are mostly involved in planting, since it is believed that their fertility gets transferred to the seeds they sow, but they also perform hard farm labor as well.

Apart from working on farms, the other primary duties of Burundian women include cleaning, cooking, taking care of the children, and performing other household chores. Women are almost entirely unrepresented in the business sector. The little contribution they make to Burundi's economy is through the agricultural sector.

It is unlikely that there is even a single company in Burundi that has a female as its head. Burundian women are limited to low-level positions, holding only about 16 percent of various administrative and managerial posts and 44 percent of professional and technical positions.

One Burundian businesswoman who is famous, for all the wrong reasons though, is Aziza Kulsum, also known as Madame Gulamali. She is the former head of the coltan mining monopoly in the Democratic Republic of Congo, called Societe Miniere des Grands Lacs, and she is accused of money laundering.

The growth-rate or outlook for Burundian women in the area of business remains very bleak. With money scarce and societal discrimination, they just do not have the necessary economic or social support to venture into the business sector.

The constitution expressly provides women the same employment opportunities as men, and women are not barred from any jobs. However, for certain jobs, men are clearly preferred, and female participation is nonexistent.

Burundian women traditionally dress conservatively in bright-colored robes, but many are now wearing Western-style clothes.

With most Burundian women working in the agricultural sector, they often carry their children around with them by tying them onto their backs or perching them on their hips. However, if the mother cannot take the child to work, the responsibility of childcare usually falls on the elder siblings.

Only a few kindergarten and childcare facilities exist and can be found only in Burundi's capital and other major

cities. However, children are considered precious, and Burundian social customs dictate the mother must take care of the children, resulting in the fact that very few women make use of these childcare facilities.

Women as Business Owners

Women have almost no presence in the business sector of the Burundian economy. A few of them run small micro-enterprises that focus mostly on agricultural and food products. The food processing industry primarily consists of coffee processing, and quite a few women are involved in this sector. Brewing beer, bottling soft drinks, and production of certain light consumer goods are other sectors where women can be found.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although Burundi is a strongly male-dominated society, Burundian businessmen have no problems in conducting business with foreign businesswomen. Personal relationships are important, as is a certain level of trust. Having a local friend introduce you to local business groups or clubs is helpful. Touching someone is not advisable, since it indicates that you know him or her well. It is better to wait for the individual himself to make the first move with regard to touching. Burundians expect people to act courteous and reserved, and they also value kindness and warmth.

Cambodia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In Cambodia, women are generally considered secondary to men. They are more likely to live in poverty and have less access to education, health, paid employment, land ownership, resources, and power than men. Women do most of the work in this patriarchal society, but men do most of the decision-making.

Widespread discrimination against women continues to exist in Cambodia. A girl in Cambodia is traditionally compared to a piece of cotton and a boy to a diamond. During the infamous *Khmer Rouge* rule, when a million Cambodians were killed by starvation or execution, women survived the atrocities better than men. This has led to women becoming the disproportionate majority in the labor force. Today, 65 percent of the population and 70 percent of the working population are women.

The role of Cambodian women in areas like politics, law, medicine, and business is slowly developing. In 2003, 12 women were elected to the national assembly, an increase of 5 from the 1998 election. Only 9 percent of civil servants and 8 percent of the judges are women. Although the government tried to increase the quota of seats for women in the 2002 Commune elections to 30 percent, it was rejected, and only 8.5 percent of the total counselors elected were women.

The government has launched many schemes to improve the condition of Cambodian women, like the *Neary Ratanak* plan and a program focusing on six priority areas of women's development: poverty reduction; primary health care (including reproductive health care) and education; legal protection; entrepreneurship training; institutional capacity-building; and management strategy.

Traditionally, men's roles have included fishing, plowing, making and repairing tools, and caring for cattle, while women have transplanted seedlings, done housework and shopping, and looked after the children. Women also served as the traditional decision-makers in matters of family finance. In urban areas, gender discrimination is much less, and some women are also playing important roles in civil services and politics.

There are no dress code restrictions for Cambodian women, whose attire runs the gamut from traditional to modern.

Legal Rights

According to the Cambodian constitution, all men and women are equal before law. Women also have the right to vote and the right to own and inherit property. According to the National Abortion Law enacted in November 1997, women have the right to abortion in Cambodia as long as a person authorized by the Ministry of Health performs the procedure. According to the Law on Marriage and Family, women have the right to separate from their husbands and seek divorce. The courts determine custody of children, except in the case of infants, where the mothers get custody.

Education

Cambodian women face gender discrimination in matters of education. The women's literacy rate (age 15 or over) is a poor 64 percent compared to the men's rate of almost 85 percent. Perhaps this is partially due to the fact that most parents consider marriage a better option for girls than education. The Cambodian system of education is co-educational, and boys and girls share classrooms. Although the law proclaims equal opportunity for boys and girls, lack of access to information and poor awareness of the laws and rights of women has hindered women's participation in the job market (especially in the public sector)

Dating and Marriage

Although arranged marriages have been the tradition in Cambodia, today's women can marry the partner of their choice. Traditional families forbid their girls to date or mingle freely with boys, but attitudes are changing among many Westernized Cambodians, including girls. Eighteen is the legal age to marry for girls while it is twenty for boys. Cambodian women, like the Vietnamese, take their husband's first and last name upon marriage. Although the present Cambodian constitution forbids polygamy, it is often practiced informally because of the population imbalance, where women outnumber men, and women sometimes have to accept married men as life partners.

Despite women's inferior status, they generally serve as the decision-makers in family financial matters.

In case of divorce, Cambodian women are entitled to alimony until the moment she remarries. Women have equal rights to parental property. Women bringing their parental property into a marriage can take it with them when they divorce. Widows and divorcees have to wait 300 days before they can remarry (to avoid certain legal disabilities), while their male counterparts can marry anytime. If the divorcing couple cannot reach an agreement regarding custody of children, the court settles the matter.

It is unfortunate for those women who are childless, as Cambodian culture looks down upon infertility in women.

Health

Due to the lack of basic healthcare facilities in Cambodia, the maternal mortality rate remains very high and is estimated at 437 per 100,000 live births. Most women in rural areas do not receive antenatal care, while the situation in urban areas is slightly better. According to estimates in 2000, only 34 percent of the total births in the previous five years had been medically assisted. Women are permitted to make their own healthcare decisions including whether to have an abortion. The government has also initiated the safe motherhood policy for improving the maternity services. Family planning is uncommon in Cambodia, and women tend to have many children. More urban women, however, practice family planning methods like contraceptives.

Women in Business

General View

Despite the stranglehold of tradition, women in largend increasing numbers are entering the Cambodian workforce. Although they were mostly engaged in clerical and other low-paying jobs, they now make their presence felt in industry, agriculture, and fisheries. It has been more difficult for them to enter the fields of business and commerce, except as owners of micro-enterprises.

Despite male attitudes frowning upon women's entry in to business and the professions, more women are attempting to enter the fields of medicine, research, journalism, and information technology.

Legal Rights

According to the present constitution, Cambodian women enjoy the same legal rights as men, including voting and inheritance rights, and the right to own property and run businesses. Women have the right to participate in all economic, political, cultural, or social activities. Women also enjoy absolute ownership to properties that they possessed prior to their marriage, and the husband has no claim on such properties.

Constitutional guarantees notwithstanding, Cambodian women earn about two-thirds of their male counterparts, on average, and work longer hours under more difficult working conditions. A high percentage of women, recorded at 25 percent at one point, have also reported cases of domestic violence.

Women in Professions

Agriculture and fisheries have been the occupational sectors where women traditionally found employment. Almost 25 percent of the employed women work in the manufacturing sector and about 40 percent in the wholesale and retail trades. As the fledgling market economy of Cambodia grows, more opportunities are likely to open up for women.

The male domain of politics is also gradually opening its doors for aspiring women, despite enormous obstacles (including the murder of female candidates). Women increased their participation in the legislature from 5 percent to 10 percent from 1993 to 1998 in addition to gaining ministerial roles as well. They still remain largely absent from posts in provincial, district, and commune-level administrations.

The few well-known women business leaders serve in the government and NGO arena in Cambodia. They include Keo Sovannary, the leader of the Cambodian Department of Fisheries, who led the training and promotional program for female staff in fish processing and marketing, and Nanda Pok, the executive director of Women for Prosperity, who is known internationally for her effective work to train Cambodian women to succeed politically and economically.

Women are not barred from any professions in Cambodia, and no dress code restrictions exist that prevent them from working in certain jobs. Traditionally, Cambodian women have worn the *sampot*, consisting of a shirt or blouse with a skirt-like lower garment. Educated urban women are increasingly adopting Western-style clothing.

Immediate family members mostly care for the children of working mothers., but those who can afford it hire nannies or babysitters. State-sponsored programs for childcare centers are only in the speculative stage.

Women as Business Owners

Women business owners are generally found in the agricultural and fisheries sectors. Many of them also own small-scale enterprises manufacturing hand-woven carpets, traditional artifacts, and clay crafts.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen should dress conservatively when dealing with government officials. Cambodian businessmen can be off-putting at first but are cordial and respectful with the educated and well-informed business guest. Local businesswomen are likely to treat foreign business counterparts with courtesy and deference. It is considered rude in this country to touch another person's head, even if it was meant as a friendly gesture. If invited for an informal meal, you should be aware that chairs may not be offered. Although men and women both sit on floor mats, women are expected to sit with their legs tucked on one side, and men will sit cross-legged.

Cameroon

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Cameroonian women have a lower status than men and are discriminated against in matters of marriage, divorce, and land possession within local communities. However, their control of subsistence activities and role as carriers of traditions allow women to wield informal power within the household.

Studies on the legal, social, economic, and political status of Cameroonian women have shown the link between the high levels of violence against women and their low status in all aspects of life. The custom of paying the "bride price" has led men to regard the wife as property for which they have paid, and they feel entitled to her physical labor. The law makes it extremely difficult for a woman to divorce her husband, and the government is unable to protect women from violence.

Cameroon doesn't have a unified gender profile due to the existence of diverse ethnic and cultural groups in the country. Despite this, there is a universal acceptance of local traditions discriminatory to women. Religious variation also affects women's rights, particularly with regard to education. For instance, Catholic girls are generally well educated, while Muslim girls have access to little or no education. Strong traditional gender roles notwithstanding, women are expanding their involvement in the workplace, which are now concentrated in clerical and administrative positions.

There are no dress code restrictions for women in the workplace.

Legal Rights

In theory, civil law provides equal status and rights for men and women, but this is seldom followed in practice. The customary laws of some ethnic groups allow husbands almost complete control over family property, and the extent to which a woman can inherit from her husband varies from group to group. Generally, males have greater authority and benefits than females and are the sole heirs in matters of inheritance.

Furthermore, the constitution lacks a legal definition of discrimination, and some points of the civil law are grossly unjust to women. For instance, the 1981 Civil Code allows a husband to oppose his wife's right to work in a separate profession and also allows a husband to end his wife's commercial activity, if the protest is made in the interest of the family. Women in Cameroon have general rights such as the right to vote, drive vehicles, and own property. Abortion is illegal in Cameroon with exceptions for rape and maternal health.

The Civil Code awards child custody to the spouse who obtains the divorce, but both parents retain their right to supervise the upbringing and education of their children. Women can initiate divorce, but the fear of breaking traditions and customary law prevents many women from exercising this right. Moreover, a woman who initiates

divorce must return the "bride price" and, invariably, the woman will not have the means to pay this amount back.

Education

Cameroon's educational system offers free and obligatory primary schooling. Well-educated girls in Cameroon usually come from the ethnic groups Bulu-Beti-Fang or Beamlike, or they are Christian or urban and from the South or West of the country. According to 2003 estimate, the adult literacy rate was 73.4 percent for women and 84.7 percent for men. Classrooms are shared between boys and girls and sometimes between students of different grades. The prevailing economic, political, and social conditions in Cameroon limit job opportunities for women, despite the existence of labor statutes against gender discrimination.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Among the many ethnic groups, traditional marriages have been arranged with varying degrees of veto power by the bride and groom. This has given way to marriage by individual choice based more on mutual affinity and shared values than family perceptions. The problem of forced marriages, wherein some parents give their daughters in marriage without their consent, is still a reality, however.

Dating is not socially accepted in Cameroon, but that is slowly changing with the advent of globalization. Social and religious events provide occasions where women and men meet. Many ethnic groups believe that late marriage helps the couple to realize whether or not they are compatible. The law fixes a minimum age of 15 years for a bride. Still, many families forcibly marry off their daughters by the age of 12.

Polygamy is permitted by law and tradition but is not always practiced at present due to financial constraints. Some women actually welcome small-scale polygamy for the company and mutual assistance a co-wife provides. The co-wives co-habit in the same compound but live in separate dwellings and follow a system of seniority whereby the senior or eldest wife is treated with the most respect and controls the household.

Cameroonian laws discriminate against married women in cases of inheritance. The wife is considered part of her husband's "inheritance property" and cannot exercise her rights over her own property without the consent of the husband. Women generally do not take the husband's name when they get married.

Women are disproportionately burdened with domestic tasks such as cooking, collection of fuel wood and water, and childcare, and they work 1.5 to 3 times longer than men on average. Cameroon has a high fertility rate, and women who cannot or do not want to bear children are treated with less respect. As for child custody, the Civil Code awards it to the spouse who obtains the divorce, and both parents, regardless of which spouse obtains custody of the children, retain their right to supervise the upbringing and education of their children.

Health

A mere 15 percent of the population has access to medical services. Urban women have equal access to medical care and health services. Healthcare includes: maternal child health centers (for prenatal, childbirth, and under-five care) and private, general, and central hospitals. In rural health centers, nurses and pharmacists play an important role in treatment and prescription of medication. Cameroonian health care also includes traditional practices and Islamic medicine.

Women in Cameroon cannot make unilateral health care decisions and have to involve their family in the decision-making process. Cameroonian women have free access to birth control measures despite the unfavorable cultural perceptions.

Interesting Social Customs

Pre-adolescent girls of far North and Southwest provinces are subjected to female genital mutilation (also called female circumcision), and no law exists to prohibit this practice.

When a woman becomes widowed, she is prohibited from bathing for a certain length of time. At the end of this period the widow, her friends, and family (females only) go to the river and bathe her to “purify” and wash away the evil spirits that surround her.

Women in Business

General View

In general, local traditions favor men in Cameroon. The condition of women has seen slow progress with the advent of more women organizations, and more people acknowledge the principle of equality between men and women. Urban women have gained prominence in higher education, government ministries, and, to a far lesser extent, business. Illiteracy among rural women remains the major obstacle in their development.

Legal Rights

In 1946, Cameroon laws gave women the right to vote. despite the Cameroon's Law of Succession, a discriminatory inheritance system still prevails in Cameroon. Often, women do not inherit property because male relatives receive the estate's letters of administration. Women also do not have control over joint property after the death of their husbands. In such cases, the husband's family takes over the property, or the woman may have the obligation to continue conjugal relations with the husband's male kin.

Labor law guarantees women equal opportunity to employment, free choice of a profession, and equal pay and treatment for the same work. However, women routinely receive less pay, and the Labor Code even contains certain provisions that directly put women at a disadvantage regarding promotion and salary.

Women in Professions

Women principally work as farmers, small traders, domestic workers, and homemakers. Even today, women own or manage very few of the country's export-oriented businesses. A couple of prominent women in Cameroonian economic life include Pauline Biyong,

founder and former president of the Federation of Women's Associations of Cameroon, and Gisele Yitamben, the executive director of the Association pour le Soutien et L'Appui à la Femme Entrepreneur Laure Sohe.

Even though laws do not bar women from any professions, husbands typically choose their wife's profession or career for them. Working women continue to have full accountability for all household and child-rearing duties, but older siblings or grandparents may share the responsibility for childcare. Cameroon does not have state-sponsored childcare facilities.

Women as Business Owners

In Cameroon, women run 57 percent of small and micro businesses. In most areas, women take the responsibility of feeding their families. They grow staple food crops and process dairy products. Cameroon businesswomen engage themselves in a wide range of activities like hairdressing, sale of fresh and desiccated food, and the running of secondhand clothes shops.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Cameroonians treat foreign businesswomen affably. At meetings, they greet each person by name and offer a handshake. Generally they take pride in how they dress, and they expect foreigners to dress well, too. Visitors should wear clean, well-pressed clothing for meetings and dinners. However, one should not wear Cameroonian traditional dress out of respect for the local culture. In more traditional households, men eat first, women second, and children last. Female foreigners will usually eat with the men, for the simple reason that they are perceived to have a higher status than local women.

Canada

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Canada is a progressive Western society, and its government institutions, academic bodies, and businesses generally all work together to improve the quality of life of its female citizens by offering protection, incentives, and opportunities designed to bring women to a point of parity with their male counterparts. The country has some distance to go before reaching its stated goals of gender equality after a long history as a male-dominated "frontier" society, but it has progressed further than many of its Western hemisphere counterparts.

The effect of public policy and social change over the last few decades has changed the role of women in Canada substantially. Traditional roles of homemaker, wife, and mother have been expanded to the point where women now contribute to all aspects of Canadian society and are on their way towards eventual equality with men. Changing public opinion and diverse and well-funded progressive social programs will likely continue this trend.

Native Canadian aboriginal culture was matriarchal, but Canada's modern society has a history of male dominance. That said, women are basically treated the same as men, without deference and without prejudice. Both men and women have equal participation in political life and government, but the percentage of women running for and being elected to office still stands at less than 25 percent nationwide. Only one female Prime Minister of Canada (Kim Campbell) has served the country, and her term lasted less than five months.

Women have made major strides in professional and business arenas and are equally represented in healthcare and on their way to equal representation in the legal profession as well (over 30% of lawyers are now female, lawyers who are retiring are disproportionately male, and 56% of law school graduates are women). In business, the number of female-led businesses has grown at a rate twice the national average for all businesses over the last decade, and women-owned businesses have created employment at four times the average rate for all Canadian businesses.

Although the written law in Canada accords equal rights to both genders, for many women the enjoyment of their rights is restricted by their social obligations (i.e., to raise children, take care of elderly parents, manage the household) and the economic obstacles created by these obligations. Because many women find it difficult to find the time and money to pursue further education or don't have enough time to hold a full-time job due to their family obligations, more Canadian women than men still live below the poverty line, head single-parent households, and work in the low-pay service sector.

This disparity in status of women is especially pronounced in rural Canada where addressing education, childcare, housing, and healthcare issues are major priorities for the government. Women of non-European descent in Canada (native and immigrant households) also generally play a more traditional role than that of the

majority population and, therefore, face more challenges as well. These two groups make up a very large percentage in Canada: 4.4 percent of the population being of aboriginal descent and 44 percent of Toronto's population having been born outside of Canada.

There are no restrictions on dress for women in Canada apart from those imposed by the cold climate.

Legal Rights

Canadian law guarantees women and men equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities in all aspects of life, and this is reinforced by criminal statutes against any kind of discrimination or harassment based on gender. The general rights of all Canadian citizens, regardless of gender, include the right to vote, the right to drive vehicles, and the right to own and inherit property. There are no gender restrictions for what can be bequeathed or inherited, and in most matters of inheritance wives have priority over children. Aboriginal women, however, may lose their special benefits as members of a minority group if they marry a non-aborigine, despite the fact that men can marry non-aborigine women without losing these privileges.

The right to make decisions about birth control and abortions is also safeguarded by Canadian law, which allows access to abortion to all citizens free-of-cost. Women also have the right to initiate divorce and they initiate nearly 75 percent of all divorces in Canada. After a divorce women usually get custody of children since lawmakers feel that women still serve as the primary care-providers for children.

Education

Access to education is universal for Canadian citizens, and women participate at a higher level than men in the education system as a whole. Literacy rates for women are comparable to men, and reading levels are actually appreciably higher among girls. Canada has compulsory and free secondary education up until age 16 for all citizens, and 92.8 percent of women complete secondary education (a 5 percent higher rate than men). Women have also outnumbered men in undergraduate enrollment for several years. Most schools in Canada are coeducational, but many single-sex schools exist as well.

Women earn, on average, 62 percent of what men earn, but this percentage continues to increase every year. The federal plan of the government has outlined strategies to improve women's access to lifelong education in the fields of science and technology in order to increase female participation in these traditionally under-represented sectors.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Canadian women choose their own mates and typically start dating at the age of 15 or 16. People typically meet in their academic, family, and work settings through friends, at bars and clubs, and through online dating, which has gained in popularity in recent times. Immigrants and their children who come from South Asian cultures, a large percentage of Canada's recent immigrants, still practice arranged marriages.

Women can legally consent to marry when they have attained the age of 18 years, although women as young as 16 can also marry with parental or court consent. Cohabitation is common in Canada, with over 10 percent of couples having lived together long enough to be considered married according to “common law.” Marriage between people of the same gender still remains illegal, but the courts are currently reviewing this law. All of the assets of a married person are considered the joint property of the couple unless they have arranged pre-nuptial agreements to the contrary. Marriage to more than one person at the same time is illegal in Canada.

Canadian women generally use their husband's name after marriage, although approximately 15 percent retain their maiden names and another 15 percent or so use a combined or hyphenated name. In case of a divorce, the wife retains the right to keep her married name or to revert to her maiden/former name. Both adult members of a household share in its responsibilities, but women still typically bear a disproportionate amount of the work.

The birth rate in Canada has dropped over the last 30 years from an average of two children per woman to 1.5, but there is no social stigma attached to having fewer children. In a divorce, child maintenance has to be paid in terms of a percentage of the noncustodial parent's income. Custody of children is either split or joint, and the courts grant visitation rights to the non-custodial parent.

Health

Health Canada (the federal department responsible for maintaining and improving the health of Canadians) has taken steps to ensure that the needs of women are taken into account in their program and policy development. The health system in Canada grants women and men equal (and free) treatment and strives to attain equal benefits for both.

The infant mortality rate in Canada has fallen over the last 30 years and is one of the world's lowest. Government maternity and parental benefits have recently been extended to one year from six months. Women can make their own healthcare decisions including questions of birth control (used by 80 percent of Canadian women of child-bearing age) and abortion. Women and girls have universal and free access to birth control, but areas of the country with large Roman Catholic populations (Quebec and the Maritime provinces) do not adequately fund access to reproductive services to the extent of other Canadian provinces, thereby imposing obstacles to women in need of these services.

Interesting Social Customs

Women play a critical role in passing on traditions and knowledge in Canada's indigenous First Nations cultures. One traditional adage translates as, “If you don't listen to your mother, you won't live long.” An interesting practice among some native peoples was to use moss for children's diapers.

Women in Business

General

Canada offers a very encouraging environment for female businesspeople, and successful women are treated as important role models. Government policies assist

women through a wide range of educational incentives, healthcare policies, and business preferences.

Over the last 20 years professional services have shown very high increases in participation by women, and women have also made in-roads into traditionally male-dominated industry sectors. Women participate at all levels of the business world, from the low end of the spectrum, where there is still a high concentration of women in lower paid and lower skill sectors, to the high end, where there are many examples of women in senior management positions despite an “old boy's” network that has slowed gender parity at the highest corporate levels.

Legal Rights

The Canadian Constitution grants the right to own property, to vote, and to make decisions about reproduction (i.e., using birth control, having abortions). There are clear and specific prohibitions against gender-based discrimination in hiring and housing. This legal “equality” with men is reinforced by criminal laws to protect women against sexual assault and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Legally, employers cannot pay “unequal” wages to employees based on their gender, but gender wage discrimination still exists, although at a lower level in the public sector than the private sector. Self-employed women also tend to earn less than their male counterparts due to their child-rearing responsibilities, which require them to work fewer hours.

Women in Professions

Traditional jobs for women in Canada have been working in agricultural and fisheries production, retail, sales, and professions like teaching and nursing. Women have, however, made huge strides in the professions and now make up a substantial percentage of all accountants, architects, consultants, doctors, and lawyers.

Prominent female business owners and executives include: Rebecca MacDonald, Energy Savings Income Fund; Elaine Minacs, Minacs Worldwide Inc.; Janis Grantham, Eagle Professional Resources Inc.; Teresa Cascioli; Lakeport Brewing Corp.; Marilyn Sheftel, Silverhill Acura; Robin Todd-Marks Supply Inc.; Renée Unger, Intercorp Excellent Foods Inc.; Susan Niczowski, Summer Fresh Salads Inc.; Shannon Bowen-Smed, BOWEN Workforce Solutions Inc.; Lise Watier, Lise Watier Cosmétiques Inc.; Rossana DiZio Magnotta, Magnotta Winery Corp.; Muriel Jasek, AJJA Information Tech Consultants Inc.; Carinta Mannarelli, Global Currency Services Inc.; Becky McKinnon, Timothy's Coffees of the World Inc.

There are no specific gender-based prohibitions on participation in labor, although women employed in the defense forces cannot enroll in submarine duty or Roman Catholic chaplaincy.

There are no dress codes for women that prevent them from particular professions.

Women are still considered to have the primary responsibility for raising children, whether or not the woman is working. The majority of single-parent households are headed by women and have incomes at, or below, the poverty level.

State-sponsored healthcare is not provided, although women with financial need can receive some some

government assistance. The state monitors the treatment of very young children through child welfare organizations, but, for the most part, parents have absolute control over children under the age of four or five.

Women as Business Owners

Women partially or wholly own nearly half of the small businesses in Canada, and statistics show a 200 percent increase in the number of businesses incorporated by women in the 1990's (*Bennett Gold Chartered Accountants, 1999*). These new businesses had the same success/survival rate as male-owned businesses but employed four times as many employees as the average Canadian business.

Most women entrepreneurs in Canada work in either the service or retail sectors, although women also own a significant number of small and medium-sized companies in technology, manufacturing, computer services, and management consulting as well. The accounting sector has done especially well with women-owned book-keeping services growing by over 150 percent in 1996.

Agriculture, construction, energy, manufacturing, mining, and technology are also seeing significant increases in

female managers. In fact, in 1996, agricultural services sector saw an almost a 100 percent increase in female ownership.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Canada is a progressive and deeply multicultural society, so foreign businesswomen can expect a warm welcome from their Canadian counterparts.

Canadians are reserved and polite and view matters of etiquette seriously. In general, they keep their emotions restrained and disapprove of scenes in public.

When you meet a Canadian for the first time, it is traditional to shake hands and introduce yourself. Always shake hands firmly when meeting or departing, and look the person in the eyes. Men normally offer their hands to women and consider it polite to rise when a woman enters or leaves a room. Canadians consider it unprofessional for women to wear revealing clothing in the workplace, so it is best to avoid short skirts in the workplace. Pointing a finger at others is considered rude, and smoking is restricted in most public places.

Central African Republic

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The Central African Republic (CAR) is a predominantly male-dominated society in which women are not considered equal to men, economically or socially. Women face rampant discrimination, one example of which is that only men can receive family subsidies issued by the government. This puts single, divorced and widowed women at a clear disadvantage. Women make up 46 percent of the work force and earn 61 percent of what men do. They occupy a small share of the important governmental and administrative positions.

Acute poverty, high rates of illiteracy, difficult working conditions, lack of proper health services and resources, poor representation at the higher levels, and a high mortality rate are the common lot of women in the Central African Republic. Women in the cities are better off due to better educational, health, and employment facilities. Rural women, especially those in very traditional tribal communities, are the worst hit by discriminatory customs and practices.

The government has taken increasing steps to minimize gender inequality over the last few years. The constitution of 2004 bestows equal rights to men and women. Professional associations, such as the Association of Women Lawyers, also play an active role in improving the status of women. Although women have equal rights in terms of inheritance and property, some customary laws discriminate between men and women. Some laws also prevent women from taking legal actions without their husbands', or any other male relatives', approval.

Women in responsible positions expect to be treated with the same amount of respect that a man would get in the same position, and working women are generally treated with respect in the workplace. Many women hold very high positions in both the public and private sectors

Dress code is predominantly informal, and there are no restrictions, except for Muslim women who are expected to dress modestly.

Legal Rights

The Central African Republic's laws give women the right to vote (Article 18), own, to sell and inherit property (Article 5), and to set up their own businesses. Although the law guarantees equal rights to all, women still face discrimination due to their illiteracy and lack of social awareness, and they feel bound more by traditional customs and practices than by the laws.

There is also restrictive legislation with respect to the reproductive rights of women. Abortions may be performed only under exceptional cases, i.e., if the life of the woman is in danger because of the pregnancy. Illegal abortions are very common due to very high adolescent pregnancy rates. Women are married off at a very young age, mostly in their mid-teens.

The government started a family planning program in 1987 and also developed a national maternal and child health program. However, social customs still dictate family planning in most families. Having a large family is considered prestigious in traditional communities. And women still need their husband's approval for using contraceptives.

Education

School enrollment is very low in CAR, at 45 percent, and this is proportional for boys and girls. However, most of the girls drop out before they finish primary school. Around 60 to 70 percent of women in towns and cities attend school, while only 10 to 20 percent of rural girls attend primary schools. Very few women reach the university level. Insufficient funding and the regressive social customs serve as a major cause for the low rate of enrollment in schools. Lack of education also drives many children to become child laborers.

The low level of literacy is also reflected in the very small number of books and periodicals that are published in the country. Even NGOs and churches do not have any programs for improving the educational standards. In spite of this, urban women are increasingly seeking education and rising to high levels in many sectors.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

There is still a system of "arranging" marriages in CAR, but modern women are becoming more open about being in a relationship, even when their religious and social customs prevent them from dating, and men are also more likely to directly propose marriage. Young girls are still not allowed to meet or talk to the opposite gender, and girls tend to get married in their mid-teens. Sometimes, young girls are married off to much older men.

Although educated women prefer monogamous marriages, polygamy is legal, and a man can take up to four wives. The groom is supposed to state before his first marriage whether he intends to marry again. The groom also has to pay "bride price" to the wife's family, the reason for which many couples end up living together without marrying. A woman acquires her husband's name after marriage and gets to retain it even after they separate. Women are responsible for taking care of their family and maintaining the household. Some women take up small private businesses to augment the family income.

Female genital mutilation (also called female circumcision) is widely prevalent. Domestic violence is also very common, though most women do not report incidences. Either partner can legally initiate a divorce. If a man puts the woman's belongings outside the house and locks the door, it is considered a divorce.

Health

Healthcare is a matter of serious concern in the Central African Republic. Life expectancy is just 43 for both men and women. Expenditure on health is negligible, and women in the rural areas in particular do not have access to good healthcare. The main causes of death are malaria, meningitis, AIDS, and schistosomiasis (a tropical disease that infects and destroys the liver, kidney, and other organs).

There are many small private clinics, but very few large hospitals. Poverty and illiteracy further deprive women of even basic healthcare. Traditional treatments, including sorcery, are still widespread in some communities. Although women are still not allowed to make family-planning decisions, the government is trying to encourage it as a measure to improve women's well-being.

Interesting Customs

Women in the Central African Republic are still influenced by customs and traditions, including practices like female genital mutilation. The women who support this practice say that it promotes better marriage prospects, hygiene, and virginity.

Women in Business

General View

Gender equality is only a dream for women in the Central African Republic, although, in comparison to other countries in the sub-region, the country has made a lot of progress. Women are treated as inferior to men both economically and socially, and women in rural areas suffer more discrimination than their urban counterparts. About 60 to 70 percent of urban women attend primary school as opposed to 10 to 20 percent of their rural counterparts. The high school drop-out rate among women is mainly due to the social pressure to marry and bear children. Women, in general, have lower access to educational opportunities and jobs, particularly at higher levels in their professions or in government service.

Divorced or widowed women, even with children, cannot become heads of households, and only men have the right to be paid a family subsidy. However, there is a gradual change taking place as regards societal role of women. Women in responsible positions are now getting as much respect as men in the same position, and women are becoming more active and unafraid to make their voices heard.

Legal Rights

In 1986, women were granted the right to vote. The other rights of women include the right to own property and freedom from discrimination in matters of inheritance. Furthermore, a family code has been formulated to strengthen women's rights, particularly in the courts. Despite all this, a number of discriminatory customary laws often prevail which prevent the enforcement of laws designed to protect women.

Women in Professions

The traditional role of women was limited to the production and preparation of food. However, some African women have risen to positions of responsibility and leadership within state institutions and other sectors.

On the home front, the entire family is involved in infant care. Infants are traditionally weaned only when they are about two years. There are only a few childcare units, and Christian missionary schools typically operate them. Attendance in primary school hovers around 50 percent, and the numbers drop progressively in the upper grades.

African women usually wear a loose top and a length of cloth (*pagne*) around the waist as a skirt. Their conservative dress code frowns on revealing clothes like shorts, but there are no specific dress restrictions for any profession.

Women as Business Owners

There are not many businesswomen in Central African Republic apart from women who work in private businesses growing cotton and other agricultural products or vendors of food products in markets. Few women have incorporated their own businesses, and most of them assist the men in agricultural and other related occupations. Although there is very little research on African women entrepreneurs, it is believed that women who possess economic means tend to invest more in education, their families, and their communities rather than in growing their enterprises.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Women are quite rare in business in the Central African Republic, so visiting businesswomen need to tread carefully. Friends snap their fingers to show their happiness when they meet each other, but this kind of behavior is not fitting in a formal setting where handshakes are more appropriate. The Central African Republic lacks good transportation, and many areas are prone to banditry and outbreaks of violence; so, visitors are advised to plan carefully and take all necessary precautions.

Chad

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Chadian women are regarded primarily as homemakers. Although legally they enjoy the same rights as men, social customs and traditions have branded them as the weaker sex despite the fact that in the agricultural sector women perform the hard tasks of subsistence farming (men control commercial farming) while running small businesses in livestock, gardening, and the like on the side.

Chadian society is dominated by men who occupy important posts in the government, military, and other public sectors. Women currently hold just 6.5 percent of the total seats in parliament. Chadian women are less educated than men, a large contributing factor to their differing levels of employment. Education has, therefore, become very important in recent years, and the level of female enrollment in schools is on the rise. Except for those in the northern Islamic groups, women are generally active both economically and socially.

The civil war and the political instability of the last few years have taken its toll on the economy, which is reflected in the extent of poverty. Lack of education and financial resources, abetted by clinging customs and traditions, has kept most women under subjugation by men, especially in the rural areas. Women in the urban areas have more choices, and the educated class are finding jobs in government and business.

Chadian women are still conservative in their dress due to the fact that more than half of the population belongs to Islam. Revealing Western style dressing is not encouraged.

Legal Rights

The new constitution of 1996 has bestowed many rights on Chadian women, although many of them are yet to be implemented and many communities are still guided by tribal laws and traditions as well as Islamic law (for Muslims) that discriminate against women. Chadian women have the right to vote and most other legal rights, but they are not politically active, and very few reach leadership positions. In fact, there are just two cabinet members and three women members in the 125-seat national assembly.

Abortion is illegal in Chad except under certain circumstances, like saving the life of the mother. Divorce by mutual consent is granted by the courts. An extended separation may also become a divorce. If the husband is at fault, the wife obtains custody of the children. She can receive alimony and sometimes even half her married property if her marriage was conducted under the community property system

Education

A 2003 estimate indicated that the female adult literacy rate was just 39.3 percent, while the male literacy rate stood at 56 percent. Female enrollment at all educational levels was also measured at 24 percent versus 43 percent for men. Many people in the north pursue Islamic education, but the curriculum and standards in the *Koranic* schools leave much to be desired. Primary schools are co-educational, and the classrooms are shared by boys and girls, but they become segregated as they grow older.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Chadians do not practice Western-style dating, as children remain under parental supervision even in their twenties. Adults in the family determine Chadian marriages. Often, girls are forced into a marriage because of favorable bride money that the girls' parents receive, which comes mostly in the form of cattle. The 1958 French Civil Code prohibited matrimony for boys under the age of 18 and girls under the age of 15, but many Chadian girls are married off as early as 11 or 12 years old.

Marriage rights are governed by many contradictory traditions, civil codes, and Islamic practices. If a prospective spouse breaks the engagement before marriage without any reason, he can be punished if the other partner proves that she has suffered damage. A woman is also entitled to retain the wedding presents, even after the cancellation of the wedding. Chadian women do not take their husbands' name during marriage.

Women serve as the primary homemakers in a Chadian household, responsible for the well-being of the whole family. Domestic violence proves common, with little or no police intervention. The family or traditional authorities only sometimes take up cases of domestic abuse. Polygamy is

socially acceptable among some Islamic communities in the North and the Sara ethnic group in the South.

There is nothing in Chadian law that says that women are not entitled to own property. However, women's financial dependence on men makes it almost impossible.

Health

The fertility rate for Chadian women runs very high (averaging almost seven children per woman), since the use of contraceptives is as low as one percent among women. Children are given a lot of importance in Chad, particularly among Muslim communities. Unfortunately, maternal mortality rates are very high, at 827 per 100,000 live births, and the causes can be traced to poverty, illiteracy, and the lack of proper healthcare facilities. Only 25 percent of pregnant women (16 percent in rural areas) have access to trained medical help during delivery. Less than 30 percent of women take antenatal care. Women often suffer from *eclampsia* (coma and convulsions during childbirth), hemorrhage/maternal anemia, and postpartum and post-abortion infections. Female genital mutilations and illegal abortions are other causes of poor health.

Women can undergo sterilization if they consent to it in writing and the woman's life is at risk due to pregnancy. For married women, the spouse's written consent is mandatory. However, some men do not give their consent even if the wife's health is at risk, citing religious reasons.

Interesting Social Customs

Female genital mutilation, generally done before a girl attains puberty, is a common practice, predominantly in ethnic communities in the South and East. A woman can also be legally sterilized in Chad if her life will be endangered by pregnancy, or if she is older than 35 and the mother of at least five living children.

Women in Business

Men dominate most aspects of life in Chad including politics, the military, agriculture, religion, and even the insurgency. Chadian women, however, are economically active, holding the primary role in handling family budgets and household tasks, and they play an important part of all other spheres of Chadian life. The people of northern Chad are mostly Muslims and are more conservative in their attitude towards and treatment of women than their Southern and more urban counterparts.

Legal Rights

Chadian women obtained the right to vote in 1958 and they have equal rights and protection under the constitution. Traditional practices, however, ensure men the advantage over women in family feuds regarding property and inheritance. Article 32 of the constitution of Chad guarantees gender equality in job opportunities and compensation. Jobs in government sectors are guaranteed to all Chadians without discrimination by gender. Although laws for the empowerment of women exist, very little progress has been seen in the actual condition of women, especially in rural areas.

Women in Professions

Aside from their household duties, Chadian women tend livestock, family gardens, and do trading of farm surplus on a minor scale. About 85 percent of women are

involved in agriculture, while over 11 percent do business as merchants.

A few women in this country occupying high positions include: Marie Koumandial Nanalbaye, teacher, social activist, and Member of Parliament; Hyacinthe Abdoulaye Tobio, dancer and choreographer; Mariam Mayoumbila, choreographer and theatre director; Vangdar Dorsouma playwright and theatre director; and Jacqueline Moudeina, lawyer and human rights campaigner.

Women can work in any job except in jobs involving night shifts or those requiring heavy manual labor. They can, however, work in these jobs in a supervisory capacity.

There are no dress code restrictions for women. They dress modestly in skirts and blouses or dresses.

Older siblings or other relatives look after children of working mothers. Chad is one of the poorest countries in the world and lacks proper childcare facilities. The country relies wholly on international aid, and the NGO childcare facility, SOS Children's Villages, is the only one operating in the country (since 2002).

Women as Business Owners

Chadian women own businesses only in micro-enterprises. They typically engage in selling from the household, or small-scale trading in imported goods like fabrics, jewelry, apparel, shoes, and beauty products.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Chad is a country dominated by men with Muslim, French, and Lebanese immigrants constituting the major business population. Business customs in Chad are similar to those in the United States and Europe. Though Chadians are friendly and very relaxed, respect for traditional customs is expected. About 50 percent of the Chadian population is Muslim, and care should be taken to respect Islamic religious customs. Shaking hands is the most common way of greeting each other. Take care to avoid using the left hand and exposing the sole of the foot in the presence of a Muslim. Always carry proper identification because failure to do so may result in severe consequences.

The official languages of Chad are French and Chadian Arabic. French is widely used during business dealings. All business correspondence, advertising materials, and brochures should be in French.

Foreign businesswomen should practice caution when conversing with any person because the trauma of prolonged civil war has left its scars, especially on younger people who are very sensitive to perceived verbal abuse and insult and can turn violent.

Chechnya

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Chechen women have always played a vital role in their society. Although traditional patriarchal attitudes require women to show deference to men, they also give women a position of respect. Chechen men always stand up to greet a woman, despite their age difference. A man who does not show respect for his mother, her relatives, or his wife's relatives brings shame on himself. Not only do mothers and grandmothers have a great deal of authority over the household, but Chechen legends tell stories of brave women stopping wars with a wave of their shawls.

Chechen society does not restrict women from educational and employment opportunities or deprive them of their basic rights. Chechen women have occupied positions in government and received the highest state awards before and after the first Chechen war.

The majority of the Chechen population lives below the poverty line and works for the more affluent families in their communities. Poor women usually engage in subsistence farming. Poverty also drives women in to prostitution, making them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

The effects of the Chechen rebels' ongoing conflict with Russia have forced women to take up jobs to supplement their income. It has also caused a decline in the social status of women. It has revived many of the old traditions and prejudices, and negated many of the privileges Chechnyan women had previously enjoyed.

Women have minimal representation in politics due to the attitudes of men toward women in public leadership roles. Generally women engage in retail trading due to the economic conditions of the country.

Chechen women in urban areas have greater access to education, healthcare, and employment than rural women. However, most of the infrastructure has been destroyed during the present conflict. The women of the minority Russian ethnic group have relatively more freedom than their Chechen counterparts.

Chechen women used to have more freedom than the women of other Islamic countries in the matter of dress, with headscarves only optional. This has changed with the coming to power of the pro-Islamic Prime Minister, Ramzan Kadyrov, who has imposed compulsory headscarves for women in government offices.

Legal Rights

The Chechen Republic assures women equal rights with men in all areas. Chechnyan women have equal rights to vote, drive, and inherit property. Women have access to legal abortions in Chechnya. Women have the right to initiate divorces and seek child custody, but in reality, they rarely get custody of children.

Education

Chechen women have equal access to education. Although women faced discrimination in the beginning of the last decade, they have a high literacy rate of 93

percent, compared to the men's rate of 99.7 percent. Many women are highly educated and have professional qualifications. Boys and girls share the same classroom space in co-educational schools. In Chechnya, women do not have equal job opportunities or equal treatment with men because of gender disparities and the economic and social crises unleashed by the separatist conflict.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Chechen women have the liberty to date and to choose their own partners. Chechnya's traditional dance is a vital part of courtship. Generally women meet men in social gatherings and weddings. Chechen women usually get married at the age of twenty.

Islamic laws allow polygamy. The government is hopeful that polygamous marriages will help to balance Chechnya's demographics, but still the practice is rare.

Traditionally Chechen women, especially mothers, have full control over the household and men are the breadwinners of the family.

In Chechnya, childless women face social stigma, and infertility often leads to desertion or divorce. Upon divorce, the father retains the physical custody and legal guardianship of the children. Chechnyan women have the legal rights to own property separate from their husbands.

Health

Chechen women have restricted access to the healthcare system, which has seriously deteriorated since the first war. The lack of experienced personnel and modern equipment has a negative impact on the health of women. Furthermore, the critical environmental situation, poor medication, and high stress levels have resulted in an increase in babies with congenital diseases and kept the infant mortality rate high at 51.4 per 1,000 births. The state is attempting to revive district hospitals, concentrating on maternal care and vaccination.

Society permits women to make their own healthcare decisions. Urban women have better access to contraceptives than rural women. The state expects that the availability of family planning will decrease the rate of abortions and improve women's general health.

Interesting Social Customs

In some areas, Chechens still practice the custom of "stealing the bride," usually by the friends or male relatives of the bridegroom. Such kidnapping in the name of tradition sometimes forces women into unwanted marriages.

Women in Business

General View

Chechnya's long-running separatist war with the Russian government has severely impaired the condition of its women. The majority of Chechen women live below the poverty line. Since the war has left men without jobs, women are often the sole breadwinners of the family and

are forced to take low-paid jobs, when and if they can find them. Women in war-affected areas, particularly Grozny, are the worst off. Despite the efforts of several non-government organizations (NGOs), the immediate future of Chechen women looks bleak.

Legal Rights

The Chechen Republic assures women equal rights with men in social, political, and economic areas. Chechen women have the right to vote and the legal right to own, buy, or sell property at will. They have inheritance rights and freedom to use their property for entrepreneurial activities.

The law guarantees equal pay for equal work, but in reality women do not receive equal pay for the same amount of work.

Women in Professions

War has burdened women with dual responsibilities. Most of them are forced to engage in subsistence agriculture on small areas of land to earn a daily living because their husbands are dead or sick. Nearly 60 percent of female-headed households work for more affluent neighbors. Some women work in the market as sellers. Poverty in war-affected Chechnya has forced many young women into prostitution, making them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

One example of a Chechen woman who has been successful in the face of this dire adversity is Ayhsat Mizayeva. She worked as a librarian in the Chekhov library before the first war, but after the destruction of the library she became a saleswoman in the central market of Grozny because her husband could not work. She sells children's clothes purchased from a wholesale market in Pyatigorsk and earned enough money to pay for her daughter's wedding and her son's university studies. Zainap Gashsaeva, a Chechen businesswoman turned documentary filmmaker, is another prominent Chechen woman.

Local NGOs have taken steps to provide women technical assistance, skills development, help in preparing business plans, and financial support from international sources for their business proposals.

Chechnyan women dress conservatively. They usually wear long skirts and blouses and headscarves. The pro-Moscow Chechen government has recently asked its women state workers to wear headscarves.

Chechnya has no state-sponsored childcare centers, but UNICEF is trying to establish some day-care centers.

Women as Business Owners

The most popular way for Chechen women to earn money is as saleswomen in the market. In Chechnya, it is common to see women at various markets and small roadside stands, where they earn a meager amount just enough for survival.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Even though Chechen people are hospitable, it is advisable not to travel to Chechnya for security reasons. Terrorist attacks, suicide bombings, rapes, and kidnappings have become commonplace in most parts of Chechnya. When you are in Chechnya, take precautionary measures and be alert, as pickpockets and street crimes are on the increase. Ensure that you have proper travel documents and take out ample travel and medical insurance.

Chile

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Historically, men have been the dominant gender in conservative Chilean society, with women wielding considerable influence, but mostly on the domestic front. Modern Chilean women, however, are now emerging to play very important roles in all spheres of life. Political advancements include the election of Michele Bachelet as the President of Chile in 2006, 15 women in the 120-seat Chamber of Deputies, two women in the 48-seat Senate, three women in the 16-member cabinet, 11 percent of deputy ministerial posts and regional governorships, and over 9 percent of municipal posts. Almost half of Chile's judges are also women, although there are no women on the Supreme Court.

Women have made enormous inroads as physicians, serve as the majority in the news media, and represent 15 percent of the soldiers in Chilean armed forces (a very high rate compared to many developed countries). Women in positions of authority remain few and far between but are respected by both male and female employees.

Men usually have the decision-making power in lower-class families, while middle- and upper-class women tend to have more discretionary powers. Rural women are bound by many traditional, social, legal, and economic inhibitions and generally have less access to the opportunities available to their urban counterparts.

There are no dress code restrictions for Chilean women, who generally wear Western-style clothing.

Legal Rights

The Chilean constitution provides women the same legal rights as men. Chilean women were given the right to vote in municipal elections in 1934 and in national elections from 1949. There is no gender discrimination in the laws of inheritance. Widows get half of their husband's property, and the other half is divided equally between the children, with another two parts for the mother.

Abortions are illegal in Chile, even in the cases of rape, incest, or endangerment to the mother's life. Due to this, around 160,000 illegal abortions are carried out every year under unsafe conditions, despite stiff penalties for offenders. Chile is also one of the last countries to have a legal code prohibiting divorces. The law permits separation of the couple under certain conditions like domestic abuse and adultery, but does not permit severing the bond of marriage. Most child custody cases are ruled in favor of women, although both parents have equal rights to custody of the children.

Education

Women enjoy the same educational opportunities as men at all levels. In fact, the educational level of women under 35 is equal to or higher than that of men. Chilean women aged 15 or above have an average of 9 years of education. Pregnant teenage girls are not allowed to

complete their higher education, despite directives from the Ministry of Education. There are very few female faculty members in law and medicine, and women do not have equal decision-making power in the university system. According to the 2002 census, women's literacy rate was 95.6 percent compared to the men's rate of 96.3 percent. Chilean schools are mostly co-educational, but the girls and boys sit in separate rows of seats.

Educated women of the middle- and upper-classes are not only employed in areas like nursing and teaching but are increasingly entering the high-end professional job market. Women make up only 37 percent of Chile's total labor force, and the rate of unemployment among women runs higher than that of men. Women earn about 65 percent of the income earned by men for equivalent jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Chilean women are free to choose their own life partners, but parents usually expect them to choose someone from the same class and social background. Chileans usually begin dating in their teens. The U.N. and other women's and human rights advocacy groups have criticized Chile's legal marriageable age (with parental consent) of 12 for girls and 14 for boys. Women use their husbands' names along with their fathers' names, using the suffix "de" after their fathers' names. They may continue using their husbands' names even after separation. In case of separation, women usually receive custody of children, which the courts must decide. Polygamy is illegal in Chile.

There are three types of ownership methods in Chile. Many married couples tend to choose the ownership type, *sociedad conyugal*, in which both the husband and wife have joint ownership of the property. This system is highly discriminatory against women, with the husband as the administrator of all property and a limited role for the wife in the management, administration, possession, and disposition of the assets. Women can acquire their own property only through the laws of inheritance. Infertility is frowned upon in Chilean society, and childless women have to face the emotional repercussions of social stigma.

Health

Chilean women have equal access to healthcare services and numerous public and private institutions from which to choose. Almost 100 percent of the women's healthcare during childbirth is provided by professionals, thereby reducing maternal and infant mortality rates. Although all citizens have access to public-run medical facilities, most upper- and middle-class families choose private medical services for better prenatal and postnatal care. The Chilean government is launching a family-oriented healthcare model called ANCORA i to improve primary healthcare.

Chilean women are permitted to make their own healthcare decisions except in matters like birth control, sterilization, and abortion, where the permission or approval of the parents, guardians, or spouse is needed. Society accepts birth control and the use of contraceptives because abortion is illegal. More than 80 percent of practicing Catholics make use of birth control methods.

Women in Business

General View

In the socially conservative Roman Catholic country of Chile, men have traditionally overshadowed women in all aspects of life and still play a dominant role in business. However, attitudes are slowly changing, and women now make up 30 percent of the labor force in Chile and hold important and powerful positions in the government and business. Even in the face of *machismo*, women play an increasing role in all levels of Chile's military, indicating a profound societal shift towards women's empowerment.

Legal Rights

Chilean women have the right to vote and to own and inherit property. In 1994, a law was passed establishing conjugal property as an option in marriage, overturning the existing law on separate property that gave women the right to one-half of their husbands' assets but gave the husband no right to the assets of his wife.

Marital laws are in a transitional phase, where legal separation is allowed but not divorce (a divorce bill was tabled in the Chamber of Deputies and is still pending approval in the Senate). People who wish to remarry, therefore, must apply for annulments. An annulment suggests that the marriage never legally existed and, therefore, former spouses are often left without a source of financial support.

There still exists a pay difference between the sexes: women generally earn only about 70 percent of a man's salary. Although the law forbids gender discrimination in employment, employers can stipulate gender requirement in job descriptions.

Women in Professions

In Chile, well-educated upper- and middle-class women are not only employed in traditional fields like nursing, teaching, and social services, but also as doctors, engineers, lawyers, and economists. In fact, 38 percent of working Chilean women hold white-collar jobs. In addition, women make up 23.8 percent of the administrators and managers in Chile.

There are many famous business owners and executives in Chile: Laura Albornoz is a Minister in the Women's Ministry; Patricia Perez acts as president of the Association of Exporting; Carolina Eterovic, serves as the executive director of *Mujeres Empresarias*; Lucia Pardo is the president of the Institute of Banking Studies and chairperson of WWB-FINAM Corporation (the Chilean branch of Women's World Bank).

In Chile, the law forbids gender discrimination, and women are given equal access to all areas of employment. Women also hold more than 10 percent of the seats in Parliament. There are no dress code restrictions in Chilean society.

Pre-school and day care centers for small children are established throughout Chile to assist working women. Middle- and upper-class households usually hire nannies or babysitters to look after the children. Working mothers also count on other family members like older siblings to take care of the toddlers. In many public service departments like ministries and large factories, daycare facilities are provided for children.

Women as Business Owners

Statistics show that less than 5 percent of women in Chile are employers. About 15.5 percent of the women in Chile are self-employed, usually in cottage industries like the preparation of candies, cakes, and jams.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

In Chile, international businesswomen are well respected and accepted. Chilean women, instead of shaking hands, will probably greet colleagues and acquaintances of either sex with a peck on the cheek. Foreign businesswomen should be cautious in dealing with their Chilean associates and should handle unwanted attention from male colleagues openly and firmly. Women are expected to dress elegantly but conservatively for business meetings. Chileans expect foreign businesspeople to provide continuous support service to their Chilean partners despite the distance involved. As Chileans suffer from a lack of job security, reassuring your colleagues of your continued support is much appreciated.

China

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The Chinese government gives high priority to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Since the 1990s, there have been many government initiatives, including the Program for the Development of Chinese Women 2001-2010, which identifies six areas for development towards gender equality: women and the economy, women and education, women's participation in decision-making and management, women and health, women and the environment, and women and law.

Higher educational standards, decreasing gender discrimination in employment, and changes in attitudes towards Westernization have allowed Chinese women to move out of their traditional roles as homemakers and into decision-making roles both in and outside the home. Today, there are many women professionals in the fields of medicine, law, sports, business, education, sciences, arts, and the government. Women also have equal rights regarding inheritance, owning and managing property, marriage, and divorce.

Women's participation in politics is commendable, although there is room for improvement. In the 2003 elections, women managed to attain 20.3 percent of the seats in the lower house of Parliament. They are also well represented at the local level, with women heading 500 out of the 661 cities as mayors or vice-mayors. Over 12 percent of the National People's Congress is female. There are also a good portion of women among lawyers and judges, with over 21,000 female judges and 4,500 female lawyers.

Women are estimated to represent around 20 percent of the total entrepreneurs in China. Greater urbanization and restructuring of the economy is also enabling more women to take up self-employment. However, there are still many women who have yet to enjoy the fruits of the new laws that protect their rights. Such women are more in the rural areas and in the lower socio-economic strata of society.

There are 55 recognized minority groups in China, and the situation of women in these groups is often worse than for other women. Tibetans and *Uighurs* of Xingjian in particular face discrimination in terms of education and employment.

There are no dress code restrictions for Chinese women, who are increasingly adopting the Western style of dress. Pantsuits and dresses are worn at work.

Legal Rights

The Chinese Constitution gives everyone equal rights to vote, to run for office, to own property, to inherit, and to own or manage businesses.

Chinese women's reproductive rights are limited by China's stringent one-child rules, which were enacted in 1979 to combat overpopulation. The government makes some exceptions to the one-child policy, particularly in rural areas. Abortion is legal and available on request.

Women can initiate divorces and they have equal rights to custody of children. Custody is decided either by negotiation or by court order.

Education

Women are entitled by several laws to receive education equally with men. China has both co-educational and single-gender schools. Enrollment and attendance in primary school was 99 percent among girls in 2001. Girls account for about 47 percent of middle school students and 44 percent of high schools students. The female literacy rate in 2002 was 86.5 percent. The proportion of female students in technical, vocational, and higher education is also on the rise.

Better educational standards have enabled more women to seek employment on a par with men, and women now make up 46 percent of the total workforce. Benefits like maternity leaves, vocational retraining, and equal pay for equal work are some encouraging signs for working women.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

The Marriage Law, which was amended in 1980, stipulates monogamy, free choice of partners, and equal rights to men and women in marriage. Arranged marriages are still common, although most women choose their life partners.

Dating is practiced more in urban areas, and young people have many opportunities to meet in educational and social settings and through online dating.

The legal marriageable age is 20 years for women and twenty-two years for men. The median marriage ages are, however, 22.1 for women and 23.8 for men. Women generally retain their own surname after marriage.

A law that came into effect in 1995 prohibits people with AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases from marrying. This also includes people with serious hereditary diseases, except if they are sterilized or users of long-term contraception.

The Marriage Law provides freedom for both husband and wife to own assets independently in a marriage. It also has provisions for protecting the interests of divorced women and children from divorced marriages. Divorce cannot be filed if the wife is pregnant or nursing a young child. Divorce can be granted to either parent, and children have the right to choose the parent with whom they want to live.

Because the overwhelming majority of children adopted from China are girls, foreigners may have the impression that the Chinese people see girls as grossly inferior. Indeed, it was once critical for a woman to give birth to a male heir to carry on the family name. Because a daughter would become part of her husband's family when she married, parents depended on having sons to care for them in their old age. This centuries-old preference for sons, although deeply ingrained, is slowly disintegrating under the realities of China's one-child-per-family policy. Countless families not only accept the daughters who are born to them, but cherish them and

provide them with every opportunity. In turn, most of the daughters will break with the old ways by stepping up to care for their parents in their old age.

Health

Chinese women have access to healthcare services, including reproductive care. Various laws address women's healthcare issues, including the Law on Maternal and Infant Health Care and the Population and Family Planning Law. In 2002, 86 percent of pregnant women received prenatal care, and over 78 percent of them gave birth in hospitals. Death rates of pregnant women have decreased to 50.2 per 100,000 in 2002 from 63.3 in 1997. The average life span of women is also greater than men at 73.6 years.

Working women are entitled to maternity leave ranging between two months and one year. They are also required to undergo systematic vaginal examinations and urinalysis every year. Health workers are responsible for the health of working women.

Pregnant women are not allowed to work in fields after the 28th week of pregnancy. Periodic checkups and reduced working hours are offered to pregnant women working in factories. They can also take feeding breaks. There are day-care facilities in workplaces.

The 22-day birth control pill is offered freely or at a very low price to rural laborers and factory workers. The contraceptive use rate is the highest in the world at over 85 percent. Modern contraceptive methods are widely available.

Interesting Social Customs

In the Yunnan province, the *Mosuo* women are more dominant than men in a matriarchal culture. This society, comprised of around 50,000 people, is one of the most harmonious in the world, with no crimes and no jails.

Women in Business

General View

Chinese women's contribution to the economy is immense, as they comprise nearly 47 percent of the workforce. One-fifth of all Chinese entrepreneurs are women, and over 40 percent of those work in the private sector. Changes in social and cultural attitudes, supported by effective legislation, have enabled women to enter the labor force and sometimes achieve high-level decision-making positions. In China, women are believed to be particularly fair and flexible, which makes them preferred supervisors in most sectors, including many traditionally considered male domains.

Legal Rights

Women in China have the same rights to education, employment, inheritance, and property as men. They are specifically entitled to an equal share of family property under the Inheritance Law. Women have also been granted additional rights to protect their interests in the workplace. Though they are guaranteed equal pay for equal work, women's wages are around 70 percent of men's wages. Women are also more likely to be laid off or become unemployed than men.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Chinese women were engaged in the agricultural sector, which still employs a majority of the population. Rural industry, including small-scale and household industries like producing handicrafts, employs around 85 million people, of which 40 percent are women. A majority of urban women work in factories, businesses, or in the service sector. Many professional women work as doctors, lawyers, engineers, and government heads. Women accounted for 41 percent of professional and technical workers in 2001. Increasing numbers of Chinese women are entrepreneurs. Women work in government in relatively large numbers, and they sometimes reach high-level positions.

There are many notable women who have become successful either as company heads or as businesswomen. Xie Qihua, for example, serves as chairman of Shanghai Baosteel Group and was named second most

powerful woman in the FORTUNE Global "Women of Power" list for 2005. Other prominent female executives include: Yang Mianmian, president of the Haier Group; Zhang Xin, co-CEO of SOHO China Limited; Zhang Nan, CEO of the South Beauty Restaurant Chain; Mary Ma, chief financial officer of Lenovo; and Peggy Yu Yu, CEO and co-president of Dangdang.com.

The number of working women continues to increase, although the growth rate is slow. For example, in 2001, the proportion of women in professional and technical jobs was 41 percent, up from 38.7 percent in 1997. Although women are not explicitly prohibited from any profession, pregnant women are not allowed to work in the fields from the 28th week of pregnancy onwards. As for dress, there are some dress code restrictions for civil servants. Tank tops, sandals and long hair are not allowed. Otherwise, Chinese women dress fashionably in Western styles.

Working women either send their children to childcare centers or get help from relatives like grandparents, who can look after young children. The Chinese government has recently taken steps to open more childcare centers.

Women as Business Owners

Estimates show that 11 out of 100 women in the age groups of 18 to 64 manage a business, as compared to the world average of 7. Around 20 percent of Chinese companies are owned and managed by women. These include companies in a range of sectors like manufacturing, finance and banking, trading and services.

A 2002 survey revealed that a majority of the women in business entered this sector in the 1990s and later. Women in business work around 10 to 17 hours per day, on average. Lack of capital remains a limitation for most businesswomen.

Around 28 percent of women-run businesses are state-owned enterprises, while another 28 percent are joint stock enterprises or collective ownership enterprises. Private and individual enterprises and foreign-funded enterprises make up the rest. About 34 percent of them have assets worth less than one million Yuan (US\$1 = 8 Yuan), while 38 percent have assets valued between one and 10 million Yuan. Just 10 percent have assets worth more than 100 million Yuan.

Nearly two-thirds of women-owned companies have more than 50 percent female employees.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are unlikely to encounter discrimination or chauvinism in China. Expect to be treated as a foreigner, not as a woman. Do dress conservatively, preferably in dark-colored business suits, and avoid bright colors or anything remotely revealing. It's important to follow the country's formal, hierarchical

protocols as closely as possible. Greetings and all forms of communications should be formal. Address associates by their honorific title and surname, at least initially. Always address the eldest, superior person first, and the youngest last. Punctuality is of paramount importance, and appointments should be made well in advance, but negotiations usually proceed slowly.

Colombia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Colombia is more egalitarian today with regard to gender issues than it has ever been. Educated women are entering the fields of politics, law, medicine, and business in increasing numbers. As more and more women have entered higher-paying jobs and prominent positions in society, the role of *machismo* (whereby historically dominant male roles are propagated) is weakening in urban centers, although it remains strong in rural regions.

The country's poor socioeconomic conditions and political unrest, however, have led to an increase in the number of single mothers, female-headed households, and women who have been driven into prostitution as a means of survival. Colombian women, particularly among the low-income sectors, have a higher rate of unemployment than men, and their representation in the formal sector jobs is low.

Colombian women have been relatively successful in both politics and the public sector. They generally hold more than 10 percent of seats in Parliament (despite the quota system designed to increase this to 30 percent) and consistently hold four or five of the country's 14 ministerial positions. Two of the country's 23 Supreme Court justices are women. They also make up 60 percent of the total public sector employment, although they hold only 8 percent of public sector management positions.

Generally, upper- and middle-class women are more active socially, economically, and politically. On the other hand, women from lower- and lower-middle class families often hold outside jobs, contributing to the family income and earning the respect of their male partners. When a family owns a farm, this also confers a certain degree of authority upon the wife. Furthermore, migration from rural to urban areas has helped to blur gender roles, although women are still very much solely responsible for the household.

Women of African and indigenous descent face significantly more discrimination and economic hardship than other Colombian women. Partly this is a function of geography because much of the indigenous population resides in areas held by rebel groups, but this is compounded by overt racism against black citizens and traditions of male domination in many indigenous societies.

There is no particular dress code restriction for women in Colombia. Women generally wear European style

clothing in a somewhat more flamboyant Latin American manner.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of Colombia guarantees equal rights and protection to all citizens irrespective of gender. Women have the right to vote, to pursue higher education, and to independently own, manage, and inherit property. In 1996, Congress passed a law requiring the signatures of both spouses when transferring immovable property belonging to the family. Women were given equal political rights in the 1950s, but they still hold only a small minority of top positions in business and government.

Couples from civil marriages won the right to divorce in the 1970s, but the issue of allowing the dissolution of Catholic marriages remains unresolved. The dissolution of civil marriage through divorce entails dissolution of the co-ownership of property, if any. The judge determines alimony and child custody, taking into consideration the best interests of the child.

Abortion is totally illegal in Colombia and is a criminal offense. The penalty is reduced in cases of pregnancies caused by rape, incest, or nonconsensual artificial insemination. Colombian women have the freedom to use contraceptives for birth control.

Education

The Colombian Constitution accords equal rights to education. The literacy rate of women and men is practically the same at 92.6 percent and 92.4 percent respectively. Today, about 50 percent of university graduates are women, and many of them go on to become accomplished professionals.

Rural women have less access to education than men. To remedy this, the Colombian government initiated the "Education for Equality" project, whose main objective is to remove obstacles to girls' obtaining an education.

Classrooms are shared by boys and girls at the primary level, but are segregated at the secondary level. Private schools also run many same-gender schools.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Arranged marriages are no longer practiced among the upper-middle and upper classes, although these groups strongly prefer to have their children marry within their own class. Generally women are free to choose their life partners.

Dating begins at about 15 years of age and progresses into courtship in the late teens or early twenties. Courting

usually lasts for at least a year before marriage. Young people have lots of opportunities to meet each other in religious and school settings, as well as group or community activities. Online dating websites have become quite popular, too.

Women can marry when they have attained 18 years of age, and they have the right to decide whether or not to adopt their husband's surname. Generally, Colombian women do not change their names after marriage.

The new Penal Code prohibits polygamy and illegal marriages. Civil marriages in Colombia can be dissolved by a judicial decree of divorce, which gives directions on child support, custody of children, parental authority, and visitation rights. After the divorce, any jointly owned property is liquidated and each spouse receives an equal share.

There are no legal restrictions against women in Colombia's inheritance and succession laws. The Civil law accords equality between spouses and full legal capacity to a married woman. However, as a practical matter, men make all the major decisions in the house.

There is a social stigma associated with childless couples that gives them lower social standing.

Health

The Colombian Constitution recognizes healthcare as a public service and grants all individuals equal access to health services. In the past decade, the situation of women's health in Colombia has seen some positive changes, owing to improved healthcare services and more time between births. The life expectancy for women is 72 years, which is an increase of 20 years between 1950 and the 1990s. The infant mortality rate also has improved from 79 per 1,000 in the 1960s to 19 in 2002.

Women in Colombia can make their own decisions regarding health care, although most of them need their husband's consent in issues relating to abortion, sterilization, and other major medical problems. Many rural women still give birth with the assistance of midwives. Catholic prohibitions against birth control have traditionally limited the use of contraceptives, but their use has increased in recent years.

Women in Business

General View

The conservative Colombian culture's concept of *machismo* relegates women to the traditional role of homemakers, and it remains true that women, especially those from the lower classes in rural areas, still face many obstacles in trying to expand their horizons. Limited access to higher education, the responsibility of being single mothers and head of households, unemployment, and low pay have all driven women into poverty, and sometimes even prostitution. Despite these pressures, however, Colombian women have made great strides in recent years. Urban, educated women, in particular have found success climbing the corporate ladder.

The mayor of Bogotá, for instance, appointed women to all "minor mayor" posts in his city because he considered them honest and effective administrators.

Legal Rights

While Colombian law recognized women's suffrage in 1954, it was only in 1957 that amendments to the constitution provided women with the same political and legal rights as men. Amendments protecting against discrimination were not adopted until 1991. Other vestiges of legal discrimination persist to this day, including the fact that a married woman below the age of 18 can only be legally represented by her husband.

Under the law, parents can will their property to their children of both sexes in equal shares. In rural families, sons and daughters who continue to work the land are entitled to inherit property. In urban centers, parents may pass on a family business to their children to share and run.

The law also entitles women to equal pay for equal work, but women still receive lower pay than men (29.5% less in 1992). More than 80 percent of women workers in Colombia earn less than the legal minimum wage. A labor law adopted in 2002 mandated a reduction in labor costs to generate more employment but only contributed to job growth of less than 1 percent and had the effect of forcing women to work longer hours for less pay.

Women in Professions

Traditional jobs for women lie in agriculture, textile, food processing, oil extraction, clothing, and footwear sectors, where their dexterity with the intricate work of pruning, harvesting, sorting, selecting, sewing, and packaging gives them an advantage over male employees. The large Colombian flower industry in particular is dominated by women who make up 80 percent of the 80,000 workers engaged in this industry.

While women constitute 43 percent of economically active population, the formal sector includes a relatively small proportion of women workers, and women seldom hold higher paid managerial positions or higher paying jobs.

Colombia has a few female executives, business owners, and other leaders; they include: Maria Cristina Caballero, former director of investigations at *Semananewspaper*; Defense Minister Marta Luisa Ramírez; Sandra Ceballos, president of the Human Rights Commission; Education Minister Cecilia María Vélez; María Clara Baquero Sarmiento, president of the Trade Union of Public Servants of the Ministry of Defense, Military Forces, and National Police; María Elvia Domínguez Blanco, a member of the Presidential Office for Women's Equality; and Claudia Mejía Duque, the executive director of Sisma-Mujer.

Colombian women are legally prohibited from working in underground mining, working at night in any industrial business (unless the business is owned and operated solely by members of her family), in any business where they might encounter any materials containing pigment or other dangerous chemicals (like paint factories), or in any type of work classified as dangerous, unhealthy, or which requires great strength.

Women are visible participants in Colombian politics, representing over 10 percent of Congressional seats and consistently leading a few of the country's 14 ministries. To increase the participation of women in government, the Colombian Congress passed a quota law requiring that women make up 30 percent of the highest government positions and that at least one woman be in

each list of nominees for appointment to higher offices. This can be misleading, however, since many elected women act as placeholders for the male members of politically powerful families, who are prevented from re-election or appointment by incumbency laws. Also the ministerial positions granted are typically the less powerful ones, although there are major exceptions to this rule.

Women make up the majority of employees in public administration (60%), but only hold 8 percent of the highest level offices. There are no women magistrates in any of the three highest courts in the country, although many female judges hold court at lower levels.

Colombian women wear dresses or long skirts and long blouses. They do not have any dress code restrictions in the work place.

Generally, older siblings or other relatives (including men) look after the children of working mothers. High-income families appoint nannies or babysitters to care for their children. Working women can take assistance from community homes run by "community mothers," who take neighborhood children into their own homes. Colombia

also has a large number of childcare and daycare facilities run by government and non-governmental organizations.

Women as Business Owners

Colombian women own a few businesses in the fields of small-scale and handicraft industries, agricultural products, and design. Generally women choose businesses that involve minimal risk and liability.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen can expect to be treated the same way as their male counterparts. Business visitors should greet with a handshake upon introduction and departure. Expect business negotiations to run at a slow pace, so remain patient and persistent. Finally, foreign businesswomen should be aware that Colombia is one of the most violent countries in the world, with a murder rate eight times that of the United States and where narcotics trafficking and kidnapping for ransom are growth industries. Although many visitors have passed through the country without any problems, one should still take precautions.

Comoros

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Poverty and a severe lack of education and employment opportunities have meant that life has not changed much for Comorian women for quite some time. Despite their disadvantages, Comorian women are socially respected and given significant legal protection. This may be due, in part, to matriarchal traditions, which are still evident in parts of Comoros. For instance, on the island of Ngazidja, the eldest daughter and her brother head the household.

Still, on a day-to-day basis, most women are involved in farming and tasks related to running their households. Some urban women take up formal employment, albeit at lower levels and at lower wages than men. There is not much migration from rural to urban areas, due to a general lack of opportunity throughout Comoros.

Comorian women are socially active and are becoming active politically as well, although their representation in Parliament is just around 3 percent with just one female cabinet member.

Dressing is conservative in Comoros. Women are required to cover their heads. In some areas however, a ban on Arabic-looking dress (that did not match traditional Comorian style) is half-heartedly enforced.

Legal Rights

Women received the right to vote and to run for office in 1956. The law provides for equality of gender, and in general, inheritance and property rights do not discriminate against women. Matriarchal traditions afford women some rights, especially in terms of landholding and inheritance. Women are allowed to drive.

The Penal Code of Comoros prohibits abortions except for serious medical reasons, and an offence is punishable with imprisonment or fine. Women also have the right to initiate divorce.

Education

The state provides free and compulsory education for all children below the age of 16. The adult female literacy rate is 49 percent, compared to the male literacy rate of 63.5 percent. Enrolment at the secondary level is just 15 percent for girls.

Educated women have reasonable chances of getting employed on a par with men. Most of them are employed in low-paid jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Most marriages in Comoros are arranged according to Islamic customs. Dating is not practiced in the country. The average age for a first marriage is 20 years old for women and about 27 years old for men. Interestingly, women marry two to four times on average, just like men.

Polygamy is practiced by many Comorian men. Those who can afford it keep two or more wives and shift their residence between them. Despite polygamy and male dominance, women enjoy certain privileges like the ownership of the conjugal house. Women can also hold assets independently after marriage. At the time of divorce women get custody of children and the ownership of the family home.

Fertility is highly regarded, and childlessness is looked down upon in Comoros.

Health

Healthcare in Comoros is substandard, with routine shortages of medications, supplies, and trained

personnel. The infant mortality rate is 72 per thousand live births. The lack of a public policy on contraception, due to Islamic reservations, has resulted in a fertility rate higher than the sub-Saharan average.

Development programs financed by international public assistance are making efforts to improve health and reproductive services.

Interesting Social Customs

First weddings, known as “grand weddings” are held with much pomp and splendor. Subsequent marriages are simpler affairs.

Women in Business

General View

Comoros is one of the world's poorest countries. The country has a subsistence level economy, owing to lack of natural resources, poor soil, and overpopulation, and remains heavily dependent on foreign aid.

In Comoros society, men serve as the traditional breadwinners while women work at home, look after the children, and form associations to influence village affairs. Societal discrimination against women is most evident in the rural areas, where women are involved in subsistence farming and child-rearing duties and enjoy fewer opportunities for education and wage employment. In contrast, one sees a gradual change in the status of women in the major towns, where a growing number of women are joining the labor force.

Although women have increasingly assumed better professional roles, few of them hold responsible positions in business.

Legal Rights

The law, in general, does not discriminate against women in matters of inheritance and property. In fact, the country's matriarchal tradition makes it possible for women to own land because the house that the father of the bride traditionally provides to a newlywed couple remains the wife's property in the event of divorce. Comoran women have had the right to vote and run for office since 1956, when it was granted during French colonial rule.

Societal discrimination against women exists mainly in rural areas. The status of women in major towns is slowly undergoing transformation, where women no longer have to wear a veil and find employment in largenumbers, earning wages comparable to men engaged in similar work.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, women share agricultural work with men: they cut down trees, tend cash crops (Comoros is the second largest producer of vanilla), and help with fishing and the selling of the catch. Wealthy women, however, do not have to work in the fields, but engage in homemaking and embroidery.

Although urban women have entered the labor force in a big way, there still exists a noticeable absence of women in high positions in business. Older siblings and immediate family members or neighbors care for children of those

women who do work. And there are no dress code restrictions that keep women out of certain jobs.

Women holding high office in the government include Minister of State and Minister of National Education; Higher Education and Research Rehema Boinali and Secretary of State in Charge of Administrative Reform; and Sitti Binti Maoudoudi. Another prominent Comorian woman is Lubaina Himid, a famous painter and academic living in Britain.

Women as Business Owners

Most Comoran women are engaged in agriculture, fishing, and small-scale manufacturing operations. Very few women own businesses or hold management positions in business.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Women are a rarity in Comoros business, so foreign businesswomen can expect a degree of curiosity from their male counterparts. A visiting businesswoman should take care to avoid aggressive or flamboyant behavior, including talking loudly or holding hands with members of the opposite sex in public. Simply nod your head and smile instead of shaking hands. Women should wear conservative clothes that are non-revealing: collarbones and knees should be covered, and clothes should not be form-fitting. Tact requires that you steer clear of critical comments about Islam, the regime, and government policies.

Costa Rica

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The Latin American stereotype of male dominance and female inferiority is being replaced in Costa Rica by a more modern view of women as both homemakers and breadwinners. This transformation is not just due to economic necessity: Costa Rican women have become more and more educated over the years and are increasingly able to work in professional fields. In fact, the participation of women in the job market has risen by 143 percent in the last 20 years, and women now hold positions of prominence in business, the professions, and society in general.

Costa Rican women are also very active in the politics of the country. Women hold the first and second positions of the vice-presidency, and recent national and municipal elections yielded proportionately more female legislators, mayors, and city council members than any other Latin American country. In fact, Costa Rica's statistics of women holding 34 percent of national seats and 47 percent of municipal seats are among the highest in the world.

In rural areas, women help men to work in the fields, because only the upper and middle classes can afford hired labor.

Business attire in Costa Rica is typically a summer dress, a skirt and blouse, or a light business suit. There are no particular dress code restrictions for women, although some companies have a formal dress code in the office.

Legal Rights

The laws of Costa Rica prohibit discrimination against women. Women were given the right to vote in 1948, and they have the legal right to own, sell, and manage properties and assets. Free compulsory education is provided for women under the law.

Abortion is illegal in Costa Rica, a predominantly Catholic country, but women are permitted to use birth control. The laws concerning divorce and custody of children generally favor women. Women can initiate divorce proceedings fairly easily, and men may not only lose custody of children, but are sometimes even required to sell their house and vehicles in divorce settlements.

Education

Women have access to free and compulsory education until high school and can receive higher education in both public and private universities. The literacy rate of Costa Rican women is 96 percent, the same as that of men. The primary school enrollment ratio of male to female is 90:91, while the secondary school enrollment ratio is 50:55. The practice of co-education was introduced in 1902 in all schools and universities of Costa Rica.

Employment opportunities are plentiful for women, although there is disparity in terms of wages. Men receive 22 percent higher salaries than women working in the same jobs, according to a study in 2001. Thirty-one

percent of the country's labor force consisted of women in 1999, of which 32 percent were in the service sector (e.g., education, health, and catering), 30 percent were in administrative jobs (up from 22 percent in the 1980s), and 16 percent were in retailing and the professional, technical, and clerical fields. The remaining women work in manufacturing and agricultural jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Women are allowed to choose their life partners in Costa Rica, where family relationships are highly valued. Women start dating around the age of 16 or even before that. Premarital sex is becoming common among young women. Women have many opportunities to meet men in Costa Rican society, such as schools and colleges, social functions and parties, and clubs and discos.

The average age for a woman to get married is twenty-one, and the average age for a man is twenty-four. Most women use their husbands' last names as surnames after marriage, though they have the freedom to use their maiden surname after marriage. Working women are expected to carry out all the duties of a household, including cooking, childcare, and other household work. Costa Rican society typically looks down upon childless women.

Family property can be inherited equally by men and women. According to a law passed in 1994, the properties and assets of unmarried couples must be registered in the name of the woman. Many privileged upper class men practice a kind of non-legal polygyny, maintaining two or three households with mistresses. Such men are required to properly pay child support or they have to pay fines issued by The National Child Welfare Board.

Fifty-five percent of all marriages end in a divorce. Divorced or widowed women without means find it very difficult to raise their children and to remarry, although divorce laws generally give women full custody of the children and most of the personal properties of the husband as well.

Health

Costa Rica provides excellent health care facilities to its people. The "cradle to grave" health care system run by the government offers the same medical treatment to rich and poor alike. Costa Rican women have access to all sorts of medical and health care facilities. The infant mortality rate is less than 11 per 1,000 live births, which is less than that of many developed countries. The life expectancy of women is 79.8 years compared to 76.3 years for men. Abortion is not legal in Costa Rica, but birth control measures like contraceptives are legal and easily available. Women receive excellent pre-natal and post-natal care from skilled medical staff. As a result, the maternal mortality rate is very low, with only 29 cases reported in the period from 1985 to 2003.

Interesting Social Customs

The men of Costa Rica are very flirtatious, even when accompanied by women. They may whistle or make comments, but they do not try to make physical contact.

While this can be very uncomfortable to foreign women visiting the country, the best thing to do in such instances is to avoid eye contact and ignore the person or persons completely.

Women in Business

General View

Costa Rican women still have a way to go before they can break out of the male-centric cultural perceptions of women in their society, but the long history of democracy in the country has made it one of the more progressive Latin American countries, in terms of women's rights.

Women represent over 36 percent of the labor force and, according to surveys, occupy 45 percent of professional or technical positions and one third of legislative, senior official, and managerial positions. A growing number of women are making their presence felt in business and government, and there is a perceptible movement to tackle businesswomen's issues and problems.

Legal Rights

The 1949 Costa Rican constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens, including the right to vote, to own and inherit property, and to engage in any profession. Although women play a significant role in agriculture, men are considered the "family heads" and hold the legal ownership of land. Twenty-five years of land reforms in Costa Rica have benefited only 12 percent of women.

Common law marriages are widely practiced; in rural areas, it has led to widespread abandonment to the point where women head 34 percent of all rural households.

Despite constitutional provisions granting the right to equal pay for both genders, women still receive 23.6 percent less pay on average than men.

Women in Professions

Apart from their traditional role of homemakers, Costa Rican women have always participated as workers in the agricultural sector, particularly in banana, cacao, and coffee plantations. They are also engaged in the making and selling of handicrafts for the tourist industry. Many women have also established themselves in small-scale industries.

There are many accomplished Costa Rican women in business, academia, and governmental organizations including: Sonia Picado Sotela, former ambassador to the U.S., legislator, and co-founder of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights; Vice President Lineth Saborio Chaverri; Clotilde Fonseca, executive president of the National Training Institute; Katerina Anfossi and Maria Suarez Toro, co-founders of the Feminist International Radio Endeavour; and Supreme Court associate justices Ana Virginia Calzada and Zorella Villanueva.

Female representation in government ranks among the highest in the world with women holding 47 percent of municipal offices in the country. This success is due to voluntary quotas adopted by political parties in 1994, laws passed in 1998 mandating that at least 40 percent of each party's candidates were women, and a 2002 election law requiring that women occupy at least 40 percent of "electable" positions.

Costa Rican legislation does not bar women from entering any profession (even prostitution is legal). Further, no dress code restrictions for women in Costa Rica, except in certain companies where formal attire may be required.

Working mothers can take the help of nannies or use the services of *Hogares Comunitarios*, a program initiated for childcare. The government, too, helps working women with children by funding houses and training young women to take care of children.

Women as Business Owners

According to a survey women own approximately 32 percent of all businesses in Costa Rica. Costa Rican women serve actively in high technology, food processing, textiles and clothing, construction materials, fertilizer, and plastics industries. But very few women own businesses in those sectors, due to the lack of capital and proper guidance and support.

Women of the small indigenous *Bribri* tribe have excelled as owners and managers of swine and cacao production. The swine management process involves 80 percent of the *Bribri* women and has helped to give them economic security.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen will notice an element of *machismo* in Costa Rica, mostly in the form of paternalistic protectiveness displayed by their male counterparts and/or personal interest displayed by single men. Establishing authority, credibility, and independence by conducting business negotiations in a serious and professional manner can prove effective in countering these, generally amiable, tendencies.

Visitors should stand when introduced to someone, but don't expect men to stand when a woman enters a room. Refer to your hosts by title and surname at initial meetings. Carry an adequate supply of business cards, preferably in Spanish and English. Costa Ricans are very forthright and don't draw much of a line between work and personal lives, so they are comfortable holding frank business conversations over meals, in the car, and at other times and places. Finally, be aware that pickpockets are known to target women in public transportation.

Cote d'Ivoire

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Cote d'Ivoire is technically a matriarchal society, but in reality women are subject to male dominance. Their responsibilities include childrearing and working in farming, horticulture, weaving, and handicrafts on the side. The number of formally employed women is increasing, and women now constitute one-fourth of the workforce in medicine, law, business, politics, and the civil service. Women who possess financial strength and family support enjoy better social status than their less privileged counterparts.

Out of 225 seats in the National Assembly, women occupy 19 seats. They also hold four ministerial positions. On the judicial front, four out of 41 judges are women, and two women have made their way to the Supreme Court.

Opportunities in education and employment vary between the rural and urban areas, with urban women having a slight edge over their rural counterparts. There is no uniformity in the lifestyles among different sub-cultures. Men wield more power in *Akan*, *Made*, and *Volti* clans, while in *Kru*, women wield substantial influence.

Women generally dress casually until their time of marriage, and after then they resort to their traditional *pagne* cotton outfit. Visitors are expected to dress in long skirts, trousers, or dresses.

Legal Rights

Women are guaranteed equal rights with men, although they routinely encounter hardship and have to struggle hard to enforce their rights. Women have exercised the right to vote since 1952. They generally do not possess property or inheritance rights, but in 1983 the government passed a law that allowed women property rights within certain parameters. In the *Baoule* and *Senufo* clans, property is handed down to the descendants on the maternal side.

Women can undergo abortion only on specific health grounds.

Before independence, women were in a position to obtain divorce easily, but the post-independence government has prescribed certain conditions for women to initiate divorce against their husbands. The person who initiates divorce proceedings usually gets the custody of children. Otherwise, the courts have the right to decide in the best interests of the children.

Education

The general trend is that boys get preference over girls in education, due to poverty and lack of resources. In 2002, about 61 percent of girls aged 6 to 17 completed primary education. Female adult literacy rates are around 50 percent, but 73 percent of men can read. Cote D'Ivoire has a co-educational system, and girls and boys learn under the same roof.

Women's role as potential mothers (requiring maternity leave) is seen as a deterrent to prospective employers. Women receive wages at comparable rates as men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Women have the freedom to choose their life partners, but family traditions influence the conduct of marriage. Parents prefer their daughters to be married within their own clans. Although the practice has been legally abolished, the bride's family gets a "bride price" that makes up for the loss of her presence in her family.

The legal age for marriage is 18, although child marriages are also prevalent. A minor cannot marry without the approval of her parent or guardian. The government legally abolished polygamy in 1964, but it still exists on a large scale.

Women become decision makers in the absence of men, as happened during the civil war. Ivorian society looks down upon women's childlessness, and some tribes still consider barren women witches.

Irrespective of custody, both parents must support their children's upbringing after a divorce. The court makes provision for women receiving child maintenance, as well.

Health

The health services accessible to Ivorian women leave much to be desired. A WHO report states that only 62.5 percent of pregnant women receive care from skilled attendants, and 162 maternal deaths occur for every 100,000 live births. The infant mortality rate is 89 per 1,000 live births. Women workers and wives of employees are entitled to maternity allowance and even full wages, along with delivery expenses.

Women living in villages are more ignorant about contraceptive and family planning devices than their urban counterparts. There is mixed use of both modern and traditional contraceptive methods.

Women in Business

General View

The government of Cote d'Ivoire has been attempting to promote the participation of women in the job market despite opposition from the more conservative forces of their male-dominated society. In the mean time, Ivorian women find it tough to compete in the job market due to employer preference for men in order to avoid the issue of pregnancy and maternity leave.

The perception of women's apparent lack of credit worthiness also poses a major obstacle to their progress in opening businesses of their own. It is an encouraging trend that the United Nations Capital Development Fund has provided financial assistance to 8,500 people, 85 percent of which were women. Other international rehabilitation efforts have also paved the way for women to take a more significant share of positions in academia, the law, and business.

Legal Rights

Women have exercised their right to vote since 1952. They have the right to own and run businesses. Women face substantial discrimination with regard to inheritances, however. In *Baoule* and *Senufo* clans, maternal descendants can inherit property, while in the *Bete* and *Nyula* group, the paternal side enjoys the entire inheritance. Ivorian women generally have equal pay with men in the formal business sector.

Women in Professions

Cote d'Ivoire is fundamentally an agrarian economy, and most of women's economic activity is in agriculture and related trades. Women play a dominant role in horticulture, which fetches meager returns, while men concentrate mainly on growing lucrative cash crops. Other areas of female economic activity in the agricultural sector include forestry, fishing, and animal husbandry. Since independence, women in urban areas have made some inroads into the professions as professors, doctors, and engineers. There are few examples of Ivorian women leaders, but Beatrice Amoakon, the president of Société Africaine des Plantations d'Hévéas SA, is a prominent Ivorian businesswoman.

With the end of the civil war and the growth of the Ivorian economy, the prospects for women in business look bright, provided the government and foreign donors continue with their efforts toward women's empowerment. As for their work dress, women wear formal business attire of knee-length skirts or trousers, in which they can easily work. Other members of the family look after

children of working women. Labor laws make provisions for childcare centers, and some companies provide such centers for their employees. Women in the age group of 18 and below are restricted from working at nights

Women as Business Owners

Besides being active horticulturists, a section of women run small-scale industrial units funded by United Nations Capital Development Fund. This has brought about many welcome changes in their quality of life. But insufficient and difficult access to credit facilities has a negative impact on the business aspirations of most Ivorian women.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Cote d'Ivoire is a male-dominated country, and foreign businesswomen should keep that in mind. That said, businesswomen can expect to be treated courteously by their local hosts. Conversations should generally be short with an emphasis on listening to one's potential business partners. Men are greeted by shaking of hands and women by kissing their cheeks.

It is common that one enquire as to your Ivorian counterpart's health, family, and work before engaging in any real business. When dressing for an official meeting, pay careful attention to your attire and dress formally. One should be cautious when inviting a male business counterpart for a luncheon or dinner, to avoid any hint of romantic intentions. If invited to dine with an Ivorian family, a woman may have to wait until the men are done with their dinner before eating.

Croatia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Though Croatia is a patriarchal society, women have equal status in many respects. Men enjoy a few more privileges, and sons are preferred to daughters, but women have a strong presence in most areas of Croatian society, including the employment sector, the political arena, and the arts.

In the pre-socialist era, women worked the fields and took care of the household. Under Tito's Communist rule, women were encouraged to work outside the home, with the government instituting quotas and other affirmative action measures.

Women make up about 22 percent of the Croatian Parliament, 13.7 percent of the County Assemblies, 14.7 percent of the City Councils, 8.4 percent of the Community Councils, and 27 percent of the City of Zagreb Assembly. Women hold four of the 14 ministerial posts. Women have more than half the judicial seats, and occupy four of the 14 seats in the Constitutional Court and half of the 40 seats in the Supreme Court. As of 2002, women comprised 62 percent of the 1,756 Croatian judges.

The percentage of female medical graduates has increased from 26 percent to 67 percent in the last 50

years. Women are also well represented in Croatia's business sector, with many women-owned businesses typically focusing on the areas of floriculture and marketing, agricultural products, cosmetics, clothing, and imports and exports. This progress occurred in spite of the difficulties that Croatian women face in setting up businesses, especially in their access to commercial credit facilities.

Croatian women in general are vulnerable to rapid economic and social changes, but the opportunities available for women among urban, educated people are better than those for farmers and the working classes. Croatia's rural women lag behind their urban counterparts in higher education and employment. Their traditional roles still center on the family, and participation in Croatia's educational, economic, and political spheres is less.

Women from Croatia's ethnic minority communities like the Roma people often face additional discrimination when entering the labor market.

There are no dress code restrictions of any sort for Croatian women. Urban women follow Western fashion trends, while rural women usually wear long skirts and long-sleeved shirts.

Legal Rights

Croatia's constitution grants women the same legal rights that the men enjoy. Croatian women received the right to vote in 1945. Croatia's Property and Inheritance laws give women equal rights to own, inherit, and dispose of property.

Abortion is legal in Croatia and must be performed at healthcare institutions approved by the government. Abortion facilities are supposed to be available in all municipal hospitals and university clinics.

Croatian women have the right to initiate divorce, though some women are reluctant to do so because the person initiating the proceedings must pay a portion of the court fees in advance. If the divorcing couple is unable to decide on the custody of their children, the courts and the Center for Social Welfare usually make the final decision. The spouse denied custody has to pay child support.

Education

Croatian women have the same access as men to educational facilities. Croatia has a coeducational system, with boys and girls sharing the same classroom space. The literacy rate for Croatian women is about 97 percent, compared to 99.3 percent for men.

More than 87 percent of Croatian girls enroll in primary school and 83 percent in secondary school. About half of students seeking higher education are women. Croatian girls study an average of 13 years.

Though Croatia's labor laws prohibit discrimination, women make up a larger portion of the unemployed, and earn lower pay than men for similar jobs. Women dominate in traditionally female jobs such as education and healthcare, and they occupy leadership positions in nongovernmental organizations.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Croatian men and women choose their own spouses, and most people develop a relationship before meeting each other's families. Young women are allowed to date, normally starting in their mid-teens. Young people meet at school, parties, and at work.

The legal marriageable age is 18, though courts can grant exceptions. The average age for a Croatian woman's first marriage is a little over 23.

Polygamy is illegal under Croatian law. Married people have three options with regard to their family names. Each spouse can keep his or her family name, the couple can choose either of the spouses' names to keep as a common family name, or they can combine both names to form a new family name.

More than 90 percent of Croatia's women look after their households, take care of the family, and contribute income by working. The average family has only 3.4 members. Being childless is generally not considered bad, though certain ethnic communities look down upon childless women.

Croatian women have the right to own property separately from their husbands, and women have equal rights to all marital property in the event of a divorce. If the divorcing couple can't reach a child custody agreement, the decision is made by the courts and the Center of Social Welfare. Mothers are granted custody of the children in more than 90 percent of the cases.

Health

Women have equal access to all healthcare facilities in Croatia, as guaranteed by the Health Care Act. Healthcare facilities in Croatia are quite good, and the life expectancy of Croatian women stands at 78.53 years.

Statistics show that 100 percent of all births in Croatia are attended to by skilled personnel, and maternal mortality rates for 2004 stand at 2 deaths per 100,000 live births. Infant mortality is 6.72 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Croatian women make their own healthcare decisions. Croatia's laws allow birth control and ensure access to family planning services and centers. In spite of that, the high cost of contraceptives prevents many women from adopting birth control measures.

Interesting Social Customs

People on friendly terms are informal with each other and usually greet each other with a kiss on the cheeks, whether men to women, women to women, or men to men.

Women in Business

General View

After the genocidal conflict of the 1990s that devastated their country, women in Croatia are slowly fighting their way up the ladder. Traditionally, Croatian women were concentrated in lower paying and lower status jobs in the fields of health care, agriculture, education, trade, tourism, and light industry. Croatian women now represent more than 45 percent of the formal employment sector and about 52 percent of the informal sector. Women comprise three-quarters of the employees in the financial transaction sector and about half in the trading and restaurant businesses.

The last 15 years of transition in Croatia have meant a lot for Croatian women in terms of opportunities and employment. Today, women constitute 20 percent of state secretaries and 29 percent of company directors. The globalization of the economy has given an additional impetus to female entrepreneurship. Despite all these positive trends, it is observed that women still comprise over 60 percent of the unemployed, even with the same level of education and work experience as men.

Legal Rights

The former Yugoslavian constitution of 1945 gave women the right to vote at the age of 18. Women were also given the right to work and the freedom to choose their vocation. Women have equal rights with men to own and inherit real estate or other property, and to make wills. Despite legal equality, however, women have had less access to property ownership than men. In certain cases, women have been made to waive their legal right to be named as a co-owner and forced to cede ownership to their husbands, affecting their interest during divorce proceedings.

Glaring gender disparities exist in wages, despite legal provisions to the contrary. For instance, women in the textile, footwear, and rubber industries earn wages that are much lower than the state average. The State Bureau of Statistics reported that in 2003 women's wages stood approximately 20 percent below men's. The difference, although small at the outset, increases with the number of years of work experience.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Croatian women did the housework and looked after the children, while men served as the breadwinners. Rural women also worked with men in the fields and on the farms. All this changed at the end of the Second World War, when women began to join the industrial workforce of the socialist Yugoslavia in large numbers.

Today's women aspire to careers in various fields. Croatian women make up 70 percent of office workers and 55 percent of all low-skilled labor. Many women also hold major decision-making positions as CEOs and Directors.

Some prominent women entrepreneurs include: Visnja McMaster, who runs the firm "Sweet Posy" of Zagreb that is engaged in production of candied edible flowers; Blaženka Hladnik, owner of Milla Ltd., which produces natural cosmetics; Sanja Penic Diger, head of an IT service firm; and Biserka Preininger Fižulic, owner of Magma dd, a large distributor and seller of imported products.

Women are restricted from working in jobs involving hard physical labor or underground or underwater labor, as well as from jobs that are injurious to life. Pregnant and breast-feeding women are prohibited from engaging in jobs involving chemical substances. There are no dress code restrictions that prevent Croatian women from working in a particular profession.

Family members sometimes assume the responsibility for childcare. The Government provides free kindergarten facility for children (one to six years of age), and the Catholic Church also runs private kindergartens.

Women as Business Owners

Croatian women wishing to start their own businesses face difficulties in obtaining credit, the absence of collateral properties registered in their names, and a lack of entrepreneurial training. That said, self-employed women in Croatia own all sorts of businesses in the agricultural, floricultural, and agro-products sectors. Some women have also forayed into the areas of cosmetics, shoemaking, software products, and import/export.

In 2005, the Croatian government launched the "Target Groups Entrepreneurship" program, aimed at empowering specific groups of entrepreneurs, of which women are one. Increasing the percentage of women who obtain self-employment loans (from the current level of 20%) is one of the parts of this program.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Croatians have a conservative business culture with formal business protocol, and things can proceed at a slow pace due to bureaucratic red-tape and inefficiency. However, Croatia has created a more liberal business framework to promote foreign investments, including the grant of special rights and incentives to foreign investors, so this business culture is very much in transition.

Knowledge of English or German is ideal for business communication. If you plan to approach one of the innumerable local agents, advisors, consultants, and lawyers, make sure to check their credentials beforehand. Among strangers or the newly acquainted, you are expected to behave formally. People who are on friendly terms usually greet with a kiss on both cheeks, and this includes close business associates. When meeting a group, offer greetings to the eldest person first.

Cuba

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Since the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the patriarchal society of Cuba has experienced a major increase in the involvement of women in all walks of life. Cuba has some distance to go before achieving true gender equality, but the country's government, academic institutions, and businesses all employ a number of women. The government is serious about ensuring gender equality in education, employment, healthcare, and the law.

In traditional Cuban society, women were primarily responsible for family and domestic activities, while men were considered the heads and decisionmakers in all other matters. Now that women are more financially independent, they continue to perform their roles as wives and mothers, but they also work outside the home. Many Cuban women work in traditionally male jobs such as agricultural and electronics engineers (67 percent), university faculty (60 percent), and physicians and scientists (50 percent).

In the Cuban government, female deputies comprise 36 percent of the 609-member National Assembly, 18 percent of ministers, and 23 percent of deputy ministers. In addition, women represent 62 percent of lawyers, 49 percent of judges, and 47 percent of Supreme Court judges. Women doctors and nurses represent more than 51 percent of the total medical staff in the country. Women have always played important roles in the armed forces, with about 20 percent in the ranks of officers. There are a significant number of female entrepreneurs in Cuba as well.

Cuban women enjoy equal rights in all sectors, irrespective of their location (rural or urban), sub-culture, or class. However, the lack of adequate jobs and the generally low quality of life forces many Cuban girls and women into Havana's sex trade.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for women in Cuba. Women mostly wear casual Western-style clothing.

Legal Rights

The Cuban Constitution gives women equal rights and opportunities in the economic, political, social, and cultural arenas. Women have had the right to vote and run for office since 1934. They also have the right to own, possess, and inherit property.

Cuban women have the legal right to terminate pregnancy, and Cuba's abortion rate is among the world's highest at 77.7 abortions per 1,000 women (1996).

Men and women have an equal right to initiate divorce. In case of a divorce, the properties and assets of the couple are split equally between them. Courts grant custody based upon the best interests and age of the child.

Education

Access to education is universal for Cuban citizens, and the female participation rate is higher than the male rate

at all levels. Cuba offers free, compulsory coeducational education for ages 6 to 16, and all higher education in schools and universities is free of charge. All Cuban schools and universities are run by the government.

Women's literacy rate was 96.9 percent compared to the men's rate of 97.2 percent in 2003. Interestingly, women comprise 62 percent of university students and 49.5 percent of graduates with higher degrees. They also make up 70 percent of the students in social science, humanities, medicine, and education.

Well-educated women have more chances of getting professional jobs than men in Cuba. Professional women are also assured of equal pay for equal work, social security benefits, health, holiday allowances, pension, and sickness allowances equal to those of their male counterparts.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Cuban men and women are free to choose their own life partners. Girls and boys begin dating in their early teens, and they usually meet in professional and social settings.

The legal marriageable age is 18 in Cuba, but the mean age at a first marriage is 19.9 years for women and 23.5 years for men. Boys aged 16 and girls aged 14 can marry with their parents' permission. Polygamy is illegal in Cuba, but many men take mistresses and maintain multiple households.

Most Cuban women add their husband's name after marriage. Divorced women retain their husband's name if they receive alimony and have custody of the children. Cuban women are legally eligible to own assets separate from their husbands.

In Cuba, women are traditionally considered in charge of the household while men are thought to be breadwinners. In today's Cuban family, both husband and wife equally share in decision-making and household responsibilities including child and elder care.

Although the inability of a woman to bear a child is considered a social ill, childlessness is deemed a blessing in some families due to the poor economic condition and cost and difficulties of raising the child. This accounts for the very low birth rate of about 1.6 children per woman in Cuba.

In the case of a divorce, all belongings are split equally between the couple. The man must pay 10 percent of his wages as alimony if children are involved. He must also give up his house for the sake of his ex-wife and children. The court determines who obtains custody of the children.

Health

The long-running U.S. embargo has led to difficulties in accessing certain kinds of specialized medicine and equipment and has affected healthcare services in Cuba. However, Cuban women have equal and free access to healthcare. Pregnant women are monitored regularly with medical check-ups and scans. Almost 100 percent of deliveries take place in hospitals, thus minimizing the risk to the mother and child. Education programs on premarital and unprotected sex have resulted in fewer

pregnancies among women below 19 years of age. Cuban women are regularly screened for cervical and breast cancer as well as for venereal diseases.

The 2006 estimate of infant mortality rate in Cuba is 6.22 deaths per 1,000 live births. Women can freely make decisions about birth control and abortions, and around 77 percent of them use some form of contraception.

Interesting Social Customs

Traditional Cuban families celebrate their daughter's fifteenth birthday by hosting grand parties known as *quinceñarias*.

Women in Business

General View

Cuba is one of the last bastions of Communism in the world, so women, at least in theory, serve both as co-workers and co-owners of all collectively owned factories, business enterprises, agricultural lands, and all other property in the country. Women work as laborers and equally involved in the economy along with men. It certainly holds true that Cuban women have more equality and access to jobs and opportunities than their counterparts in many other countries of Latin America, and even most other parts of the world. Women work as laborers in agriculture and industry, as shopkeepers, as clerical and administrative staff in the government and the service sector, and as teachers, nurses, and doctors. They are also well represented in tourism, journalism, information technology, scientific research, the pharmaceutical industry, the performing arts, and sports.

despite all this progress toward gender equality, however, Cuban women are still very poorly represented in the higher levels of the party, the government, and the armed forces, and some gender perceptions from the pre-socialist days also still persist.

Legal Rights

The socialist constitution of Cuba guarantees women equal rights in all areas – social, political, and economic. Women have the right to vote and participate in the legislature and government, but very few women occupy high positions in the party or government, apparently due to certain degree of latent gender bias.

Women's right to inherit does not have much significance in socialist Cuba, where most property is publicly owned. Some private property is available that women can inherit, though there are strict limitations on their right to dispose of such property if other Cubans are living in it.

The law assures Cuban women equal pay for equal work, and they also have equal rights to social security benefits.

Women in Professions

The revolution of 1959 changed all the perceptions regarding the traditional roles and occupations of women. Previously, women attended to housekeeping and childrearing and engaged in vegetable gardening and small-scale farming.

Now, Cuban women actively engage in agriculture, industry (especially the sugar cane industry), and the service sector. Furthermore, despite the tendency toward

male dominance in high-level jobs, approximately 34 percent of managers were women in 2000.

Prominent Cuban women include: Concepcion Campa, head of the team that discovered the vaccine against meningitis; Maria Guzman, head of the virology department at the Pedro Kouri Institute and director of the PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centre for Viral Diseases; Marlein Miranda Cona, the UNESCO-L'Oreol Fellow in Sciences in 2005 for her research on the use of radio pharmaceuticals to detect and treat malignant tumors; and, Alicia Alonso, the director of the world renowned Cuban National Ballet. There are also many accomplished Cuban female artists, sculptors, photographers, musicians, writers, poets, journalists, and attorneys.

The growth prospects for Cuban women in business appear bright due to the commitment of President Castro and other high officials to remove the remaining barriers to women's advancement. Women now comprise more than 70 percent of the managers working in the sugar industry, holding key positions like quality control experts, economists, processing managers, and administrators. In addition, women make up 51 percent of doctors, 43 percent of scientists, 33.1 percent of managers, and 70 percent of employees in the banking sector.

Cuban women are not barred from any profession whatsoever, and no dress code restrictions exist.

Grandparents or other family members look after children of working mothers. The government also provides childcare at low cost for children from three months to school-going age. The building of nurseries suffered a real setback during the economic crisis of the 1990s.

Women as Business Owners

Some half-hearted attempts at privatization have been rolled back, so there is hardly any official private sector in Cuba, limiting women's chances of starting or owning business enterprises in the informal economy. Many women (including the highly educated) find self-employment in the thriving sex-tourism industry, an unfortunate result of the government-sanctioned "dollar economy."

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Doing business in Cuba poses unique challenges for the foreign businesswomen. Cuba is a Marxist state with an entrenched bureaucracy, so most of a visiting businessperson's time is spent in meetings and negotiations with government officials. Take care not to ruffle the socialist feathers of your hosts; arrive punctually, stick to business matters, and avoid discussions on the U.S. embargo or the merits and demerits of the Cuban socialist system. Cubans are becoming increasingly pragmatic these days and are prepared to deal with anybody, including Americans.

Cyprus

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Cyprus is a developing country with a patriarchal society that is actively trying to improve the status of its female citizens. Cypriot women continue to perform their responsibilities as homemakers while they attempt to expand their roles and achieve more financial independence. Women now represent 39 percent of the workforce, and they are protected by legislation on equal pay for equal work, employment, training, social insurance and taxes, benefits, and childcare facilities. The pay gap between women and men has decreased from 33 percent in 1994 to 25 percent in 2004. Women are, however, generally hired for lower-paying jobs than men.

Although there are no female ministers in the Cypriot government, women are found in key positions throughout the public and private sectors (11 percent of managers in the civil service and 10 percent in private business). Of the total civil servants in local administration, 23 percent are women, including 12 percent of the mayors. In the Parliament, 11 percent of deputies are women. There are also a significant number of female lawyers in Cyprus. The media is another popular career area for women.

Women in Cyprus wear formal suits, dresses, or formal trousers with jackets during business.

Legal Rights

Laws in Cyprus treat men and women equally regarding their right to acquire, own, or dispose of any property. All Cypriot citizens have the right to vote.

Cypriot women are allowed to terminate a pregnancy in order to save their own life or when the newborn baby would face physical or medical disability.

Women in Cyprus also have the right to initiate divorce. In case of a divorce, the woman usually takes custody of children, unless she is mentally unstable, faithless, or financially insecure.

Education

Cyprus offers equal access to free and compulsory education to all children between 5 and 15 years old, and this has resulted in a youth literacy rate for women of 100 percent. In Cyprus, both coeducational as well as single-sex educational institutions exist.

The country's law offers equal educational opportunity and vocational training, but some gender discrimination still exists in the workforce.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Greek Cypriot women are free to marry foreigners and have equal rights to head the family, decide the family's place of residence, and transmit citizenship to their children. Turkish Cypriot marriages are sometimes arranged among traditional families. Polygamy is not accepted in Cyprus.

Dating usually begins in the late teens, and young people meet their counterparts in public places. Dating between Turkish and Greek Cypriots is rare. Women in Cyprus typically get married between the ages of 23 and 26. Remarriages and cohabitation are a growing trend among youngsters.

Women must take their husband's surname after marriage, although they can retain their own name as well. A woman has the right to retain or remove the husband's name if the couple divorces. In a divorce, the court assures each partner a minimum of 30 percent of the family's assets for sufficient support, taking into account who receives the custody of children.

In Islamic and Turkish communities childlessness is looked down upon.

Health

Equal and free access to health care for women helped to lower the infant mortality rate to just five deaths per 1,000 live births in 2002. Maternal health care and information on diseases and health hazards for women are given priority. A woman can use contraceptives without the consent of her family.

Special government-subsidized doctors and non-governmental organizations take care of family planning issues and provide information relating to sexual and reproductive rights, family law, and reproductive choices.

Women in Business

General View

despite various laws passed to assure their equality and protect their rights, Cypriot women still have to contend with the perceptions and demands of a traditional, patriarchal society. That said, the last 50 years have seen a largend increasing presence by women in the Cypriot work force. While they are still perceived as the primary source of home and childcare, women are working outside the home in increasing numbers. Their substantial gains, however, have not been matched by equality with men in terms of pay and access to highly skilled jobs.

Toward that end, the government has enacted several measures to facilitate their entry into the male-dominated areas of society. Women are entering the fields of politics, business, journalism, and the legal profession in increasing numbers. The Women's Co-operative Bank Initiative Ltd., a nonprofit organization run by women, actively promotes women's entrepreneurial activities and the Athina radio station, a platform for women run by women, highlights women's perspectives, presents female personalities, and generally addresses women's issues.

Legal Rights

Although the Constitution of the Cyprus Republic in 1960 laid down the principles of gender equality (the right to vote, to own property and businesses, the right of inheritance), the most important legislative measures

relating to securing this right are of recent origin. These include laws requiring equal treatment of men and women in employment and vocational training, equal pay for equal work, and the signing of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Cyprus was one of the few Near Eastern signatories of this convention).

The realities on the ground, however, have not necessarily matched the spirit of these actions. The patriarchal ideology of male supremacy, prevalent in all Cypriot ethnic communities, continues to marginalize issues of women's rights and gender equality. In 2001, men were still paid 34.9 percent more than women in all major occupational categories (one of the lowest rates in Europe), even when they were of the same age, had the same experience, and shared the same educational qualifications as their male counterparts.

The gap proved smaller in occupations that require greater skill, such as senior management, and greater in manufacturing, the service sector, and in sales. Unemployment among women is also substantially higher than that of men, although it certainly holds true that many Cypriot women acquiesce to the patriarchal structure of Cypriot society and willingly embrace the traditional roles as caretakers of children and household, which keeps them out of the larger work force.

Women in Professions

Cypriot women have traditionally been involved in agriculture, the apparel industry, teaching, healthcare, small retail businesses, and in clerical jobs.

Women only hold 10 percent of managerial positions in business (up from 7% in 1985), and the same ratio holds true in the civil sector despite the very large percentage of female employees in that sector and a government initiative to increase the percentage of women decision-makers in the public sector to 30 percent.

A couple of the most well-known female business owners or executives in Cyprus are Kikoula Cotsapas, chairperson of Kean Soft Drinks Ltd., and Artemis Toumazi, president of The Women's Co-operative Bank, Cyprus (BPW), which gives loans to women-run small businesses and cooperatives.

There is no restriction on women entering any field of business or profession. Women's share of professional jobs has increased by 39 percent since the mid-1980s, but this has mostly occurred in the areas of education and healthcare. More women are working in the accounting and legal professions than before, and an increasing number of women also work in the media, as evidenced by the fact that 180 of the 500 members of the Union of Cyprus Journalists are now women. Participation in technical professions is negligible.

There are no dress codes, per se, for women workers, although, in the legal field, the dress code is comprised of a dark jacket and a skirt or trousers (interestingly the Supreme Court has specified that the material and style of the trousers shall remain within the realm of good taste).

The entry of women into the work force in large numbers has not meant a decrease in their domestic duties and responsibilities. On the Greek Cypriot side, it is not uncommon to retain foreign domestic workers from countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the Philippines to handle domestic duties for working women. The government's Family and Child Services department

provides child protective services, adoption services, day care, and foster care.

Women as Business Owners

Female-owned enterprises make up 12 percent of the whole, which is small compared to the European Union's average of 27 percent. Virtually all female-owned businesses are micro-enterprises, 69 percent of them being only one-person business units. Of the women-owned businesses that generated employment, 96 percent of them do business only in their local community. Most of the women-owned businesses exist in the traditionally female sectors: the clothing and shoe industry; owning kiosks and mini-markets; trading in gifts; and running hairdressing and florist shops.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Cyprus is a male-dominated society, where foreign businesswomen will be given a polite hearing, but they shouldn't expect to achieve any major agreements quickly.

Cypriots conduct business dealings face-to-face, often informally. Trust is only built over time, and once a relationship is developed, you may find that your Cypriot counterpart's loyalty will be to you personally rather than to the company you represent. No matter how good your relationship may be, however, you can expect a great deal of bargaining, as Cypriots have a reputation as skilled negotiators. Remain calm and collected during negotiations because emotional displays are frowned upon. Address people in authority and older men, in general, with polite deference, and use professional titles of address (i.e., Doctor, Professor) where appropriate. Cypriots prefer personal meetings to doing business by telephone or in writing, which they view as too impersonal. Business attire is conservative.

Czech Republic

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Despite the long period of Communist ideology that promoted equality between men and women, there is a conservative streak among people of the Czech Republic regarding the roles of men and women in society. Czech men will still open the door for a woman to enter or leave first, help her to remove her coat, or stand up when she rises to her feet. It took entry into the European Union, however, for the Czech government to enact legislation mandating that employers treat women employees on a par with their male counterparts. The concept of equal treatment for women is also penetrating into other areas of society, albeit at a slower pace.

For instance, not a single political party in the Czech Republic is headed by a woman, and the representation of women in Czech politics is minimal. Although women participate at all levels of the Czech economy, obstacles such as professional segregation, inequality in professional advancement opportunities, differences in pay, and inequality in job opportunities have ensured that very few women occupy senior-level positions in government, science, business, law, and medicine.

The women of developing regions of the country (major cities and places close to the German and Austrian borders) have greater opportunities than women in other regions with inadequate infrastructure and poor employment prospects.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for women in the Czech Republic. Most professional women dress in smart business attire for work, while other working women dress in casual Western attire or in uniforms provided by their employers.

Legal Rights

The principle of equal rights for men and women is enshrined in the Czech Constitution. Women have the same rights as men in the areas of voting as well as inheriting and owning property. However, in actual practice, discrimination against women does exist in various sectors of society. The government has recently set up three institutional bodies dedicated to ending discrimination against women.

Citizens of the Czech Republic have a very liberal view towards abortion, which is legal and easily accessible. However, women below the age of 16 require the consent of a parent or guardian, and those aged 16 to 18 are required to notify parents or guardian after the abortion has been performed.

Women in the Czech Republic can easily initiate a divorce, and the custody of children is almost always given to the mother.

Education

Public education in the Czech Republic is free of charge at all levels, and women have the same access to educational facilities as men. There are no differences

between girls and boys in the completion of primary school, and almost all women receive at least a secondary level of education. The number of women who manage to obtain either graduate or post-graduate university degrees, however, is low when compared to their male counterparts.

Legally, women are entitled to the same job opportunities as men, but men's average earnings are 27 percent higher than the average earnings of women.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Women in the Czech Republic choose their own mates, and women normally begin dating quite early, sometimes at the age of 15. Couples normally meet in school settings, at the workplace, or at social events.

The minimum age at which a woman or man can marry is 18 years. Under exceptional circumstances, like pregnancy, courts may give permission for a minor between 16 and 18 years old to marry. Since most of the women in the Czech Republic are employed full time, many of them tend to delay marriage, and this has led to a drop in the birth rate.

Under Czech law, polygamy is punishable by up to two years imprisonment.

According to the laws of the Family Code, the bride and groom are required to declare if they will use the common family name of one spouse, keep their original family names, or combine both names. The most popular choice is for both the bride and the groom to take the husband's family name. Most women do not retain their husband's name in the event of a divorce.

Czech society follows the conservative, traditional model of the family, in which the woman is seen to be in charge of all household affairs including childcare. Since most women combine this role with a full-time job, fathers are sometimes offered paid paternal leave to stay at home and take care of the children during their first four years. Childless women do not face any sort of discrimination in the Czech Republic.

In cases of divorce, Czech courts always award custody of the children to the mother. Certain items that are not considered part of the undivided property that belonged to both the husband and wife remain the personal property of the spouse. Pre-nuptial agreements, if they exist, take precedence over everything else. Since men and women have equal rights regarding owning and inheriting property, women can hold assets separate from their husbands.

Health

The standard of medical care for women in the Czech Republic is quite good with well-equipped clinics and hospitals and easy access to gynecologists. Healthcare issues relating to pregnancy are covered by compulsory public health insurance.

Women are permitted to make their own healthcare decisions, including decisions about birth control, which is widely available and accepted.

Women in Business

General View

Women in the Czech Republic traditionally took care of the children and did not work outside of the home, but the Communist period led to rapid change, and, by 1976, 87 percent of women were employed. Only about 51 percent of women aged between 15 and 51 are now employed, but women have diversified their range of employment in the post-Communist period and made substantial progress in public life. Women are still mainly employed in traditional sectors like retail sales, health care, education, and social work, where they form 75 percent of the workforce, but they have made inroads into politics and business and are working their way up the management ladder (26% of administrators and managers are now women).

Even though gender equality is recognized, women do almost all the work at home and also involve themselves in domestic financial management. Although many Czech men consider women as the “weaker gender,” they treat women with respect and give them certain privileges in the work place.

Legal Rights

Czech men and women have the same rights over owning and inheriting property. The law gives women the right to vote. There is a wide disparity, however, in terms of salaries when, legally, there should be parity. The law also forbids sex discrimination in employment, but employers do not observe this law, even in their job advertisements. Women earn only 73 percent of what men earn for the same work.

Women in Professions

Most women work in the civil services or in the private sector (primarily banking and insurance) as lower-level administrative personnel or salespeople.

There are many distinguished female business owners and executives: Olga Girstlova is the founder of GiTy., a largeabling and networking firm, and the president of the Moravian Association of Women Entrepreneurs; Milena Vesela owns the conference management firm ProMoPro; Marie Haisova is director and executive board member of Agentura Gaia, an eco-feminist NGO; Miloslava Umlaufova runs Triton Management Consultancy Co. and is the head of the Association of Business and Professional Women of the Czech Republic. In 2006, almost 16 percent of Parliamentary seats were held by women.

Czech labor laws prohibit women from working in certain jobs like mining. Pregnant women and mothers of children up to nine months of age are not allowed to perform jobs that may endanger their health, work overtime, or go on long business trips. There are no dress codes for women in their workplace.

Most families are “nuclear,” but if the couple is working and there are children to take care of, then the parents of one of the spouses may stay with them. If the father earns enough to provide for his family, then wives generally prefer to stay home until the children go to a nursery or kindergarten. Although most schools are run by the government, many private schools have mushroomed, despite their cost.

Women as Business Owners

Women-owned businesses are typically small enterprises in the garment and leather industries, agriculture, hunting and forestry, and education. Very few women own heavy manufacturing units or fisheries. About ten percent of women work in their own enterprises, half as many as men.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign women holding positions of responsibility and power in business are not accepted easily in the Czech Republic. A foreign woman must first establish her credibility and ability with her male counterparts. She must shake hands firmly with her male colleagues to demonstrate her honesty and openness, and she must maintain eye contact while talking to establish her trustworthiness. Speak softly and never interrupt someone else's conversation. A good way to show respect and friendship is to learn a few Czech words. When invited to a Czech home, remove your shoes before entering the house.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Ever since colonial times, and even prior to that, Congolese women played roles in society dictated by traditional social and cultural norms—roles providing them with a low social status. Society basically expected women to perform traditional household roles such as cooking, cleaning, chopping firewood, carrying water, working the fields, rearing children, and making various items such as pottery and baskets to be sold at the local market. The Democratic Republic of Congo remains a strongly patriarchal society, a point reinforced by the fact that Congolese women, even as late as the 1990s, had not been able to attain any semblance of gender equality.

The society scripts norms dictating the lives of Congolese women, with the goal of keeping women subservient and subordinate to the men at all times. The culture places tremendous pressure on young girls to get married, and regards unmarried women as no better than prostitutes, irrespective of their professional status. Opportunities to participate in various areas of Congo's society remain limited due to cultural and customary practices that restrict women. The societal position of Congolese women does not usually depend on their social and economic class. Congolese women face similar pressures and restrictions, irrespective of their standing in society.

Although, traditionally, Congolese women occupied a lower rung on the social ladder compared to men, change is slowly taking place. Women now contribute more to the household by taking care of the children almost exclusively, performing agricultural tasks, and actively involving themselves at the local market. An increasing number of Congolese women also now engage in various professions, including the government and military. Some Congolese women have also gathered together to form groups that lobby for various rights and causes, such as unfair treatment or taxation.

Congolese women obtain limited representation in the political arena. As of 2004, 48 of the 614 members of Parliament, 5 of the 120 members of Senate, 5 of the 36 Cabinet ministers, and 3 of the 24 vice ministers were women.

Most of the businesses run by Congolese women stay concentrated in the informal sector, outside the spheres of men's control. Some Congolese women also work as nurses and midwives, with very few of them rising to the level of doctors. Congolese women also remain severely underrepresented in the country's judicial system.

Rural women have very limited access to educational and employment opportunities, with traditional cultural norms relegating them to the roles of wives and mothers. Although urban women enjoy greater access to various facilities, some of them tend to envy the apparently greater independence their rural counterparts enjoy working on the farms.

Each of the wide variety of ethnic, cultural, and tribal subcultures that comprise the Democratic Republic of Congo

holds different positions on the roles of women. Some of them follow matrilineal family structures, while others follow patrilineal. However, irrespective of tribe or ethnicity, women remain subordinate to men in all respects.

Congolese women do not generally wear pants or jeans, restricting themselves to long skirts (or *pagnes*), and matching blouses.

Legal Rights

Congo's Constitution provides women with the same legal rights as men in all respects, without discrimination of any sort. Congolese women, who in 1960 were granted the right to vote, also have the right to drive cars. Although the Constitution provides women with the right to own and inherit property, traditional customary laws prohibit them from owning property and inheriting it (even from their husbands), which makes them entirely dependent on the men in the family.

Abortions remain illegal—a criminal offense—according to Congo's laws. However, general criminal laws do permit abortion in certain cases: if pregnancy endangers the life of the mother, or her physical or mental health; or, if the child proves at risk for a debilitating disease or deformity.

Divorce occurs very rarely in Congolese society, with hardly any woman ever attempting to initiate divorce herself, except in cities where divorce proceedings can be initiated by women with a compelling reason. Courts usually deny women custody of the children in divorce cases, although they do grant mothers visitation rights.

Education

Educational facilities such as schools remain virtually non-existent in many rural areas, with more than half the child population of the country not having access to formal education. Congo's boys and girls share the same classroom space, and although more schools exist in the urban areas, poverty severely limits the participation of girls. In certain areas, about 69 percent of the girls do not attend school. Most Congolese girls begin dropping out of schools when they reach the age of 15 or 16, which is about the time they complete secondary school.

The literacy rate for adult Congolese women stands at 52 percent, compared to 80 percent for the men.

Congolese women lack the same access to employment opportunities that the men enjoy, and most of them occupy the bottom rungs of the employment ladder. Women also receive less pay for performing the same jobs, and Congolese society very rarely finds women in decision-making positions. Women maintain a strong presence in the informal economic sector, though.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Usually, only the wealthy Congolese in urban centers engage in the practice of casual dating. Dating is practiced in the rural areas too, although it almost always ends up in marriage. Most women begin dating when they reach the ages of 15 or 16, around the time they finish secondary school.

According to Congo's laws, the legal marriageable age for girls is 18 years, although most rural girls tend to marry a lot earlier. On the other hand, urban Congolese women usually tend to marry in their mid 20s. Although most Congolese families traditionally arranged marriages, young couples these days tend to choose their own spouses. Most married women usually retain their maiden names, but have the option of taking their husband's names if they so desire.

Traditionally, men have always been the heads of the households in Congolese society, but the war that has ravaged large parts of Congo has seen the rise of many women-led households. The law permits Congolese women to own and hold their own property, but other provisions in the civil law code make it necessary for women to obtain their husband's permission to rent or sell land. Husbands have complete rights over their wife's possessions.

In the event of a divorce, courts usually grant custody of the children to the father, with the mother being provided visitation rights. The law permits a Congolese woman to inherit her husband's property, control her own property, or to receive a property settlement.

Polygamy remains illegal according to Congolese law, but some Congolese still practice it in certain locales. In a polygamous union, the law views only the first wife as the spouse, but recognizes father-son relationships.

Health

The medical services in the Democratic Republic of Congo rank among some of the worst in the world. Access to health care proves extremely limited, with most Congolese unable to afford a visit to a doctor or healthcare facility. The lack of medical facilities and trained personnel has taken its toll, especially on the women of the country.

Standards of medical care for Congolese women prove very poor. Due to poverty, a majority of women give birth at home with the help of a traditional birth attendant. Maternal mortality rates in Congo reflect some of the highest in the world, with 2003 statistics indicating more than 1,800 deaths per 100,000 live births. Infant mortality rates for 2004 are also staggering, at 129 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Congolese women, not permitted to make their own healthcare decisions, have these decisions made for them by their husbands or other men in the family.

According to statistics, only about three percent of all Congolese women use modern birth control methods due to social and cultural taboos, the high cost of contraceptives, and general lack of awareness.

Interesting Social Customs

Due to certain cultural reasons put forward by each local culture, some women are not permitted to eat foods such as eggs. The typical dining arrangement in a Congolese family consists of the woman serving her husband, who eats first, sitting on a chair. Once he's done, the wife and her children sit on the floor and split the remaining food among them.

Women in Business

General View

Congolese women are still very much tied to their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Very few women run businesses in the formal sector, with most of their activity

confined to the informal sector. Discrimination is widespread, with women forced to occupy low-paying jobs in bad working conditions. They also require their husband's permission for virtually any sort of legal transaction, from opening a bank account to applying for a passport.

That said, Congolese women were previously completely unrepresented in the business sector of the country's economy, so some progress has been made. Changes in the educational system, and various programs launched by the government, have helped many women to venture into their own businesses and to begin to occupy jobs in the public and private sectors.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo grants women all the same legal rights as men. Congolese women were granted the right to vote in 1960. They have the right to own and operate their own businesses. Although they also have the right to own and inherit property, traditional customary law, which is followed in most areas, prevents many of them from doing so. Pay disparities are the norm: Congolese women receive lower pay packages than men for performing the same jobs.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Congolese women have been the majority of the workforce in the agricultural sector. They are also active in the informal sectors of Congo's economy, mostly in the sale of agriculturally based products, various basic goods, and handcrafted items. Women employed in the formal sector can usually be found in service jobs.

Female heads of companies are very rare in Congo. One example of a famous Congolese businesswoman is Aziza Gulamali Kulsum from South Kivu. She owns Shenimed, a mineral trading firm, and Uzabuco, a tobacco factory. The outlook for women's participation in Congo's business sector is positive, with an increasing number of women starting businesses in areas like retail stores, semi-wholesale trade, and long-distance distribution.

There are no professions from which Congolese women are barred, nor are there dress code restrictions that prevent Congolese women from taking up certain jobs, although most women tend to stick to skirts and blouses. They generally do not wear jeans or pants.

For working mothers hailing from the rural areas, childcare is assumed by relatives and older siblings. Urban working mothers have to depend on child minders (i.e., babysitters or nannies). State-sponsored childcare is unavailable in Congo, although private daycare centers do exist.

Women as Business Owners

Many Congolese women these days do own businesses, although they are generally limited to the informal sector. These businesses are mostly run without the aid of bank accounts or accounting records. Most of these businesses focus on the agricultural sector and fall under the micro or small enterprise category.

A majority of women-run businesses in Congo indulge in small trading activities that include sale of agricultural and other basic products, dressmaking, and aquaculture.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although Congo is a male-dominated society, foreign businesswomen are respected.

Initial conversations in Congo are usually built around names. You'll have to specifically ask a Congolese for his or her name. It's always advisable for you to give your own first name. Avoid nicknames unless specific permission is granted. Congolese like to build friendships before they get down to business. Compliments are

welcome, but too much praise may be frowned upon. Avoid constant eye contact, since it is considered intimidating and impolite, especially when talking to elders and superiors. Greetings are very important to the Congolese, and special respect is given to greeting elders or village headmen. Taking photographs is a very sensitive issue and should be avoided, particularly photos of military areas and checkpoints.

Denmark

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Denmark has seen the gradual emancipation of women over the course of the twentieth century, and women now play a significant role in all areas of Danish society. Danes admire women in business, and the government encourages female employment via progressive policies on flexible working hours, maternity leave, and healthcare.

Danish women hold 37 percent of the seats in the 179-member Folketinget (the lower house of Parliament), are well represented in the judiciary, and generally have a positive influence on the law-making process. They constitute 75 percent of all medical students. They are also making inroads into business ownership by starting businesses in areas like retail trading and business services.

Although women in rural and urban areas have the same access to free medical care, education, and equal opportunities, the unemployment rate for urban women is higher. Women from better-off socioeconomic backgrounds compete on a relatively level playing field with other Danes based on their educational qualifications and professional experience.

Recently, anti-immigrant feelings in Danish society resulted in acts of discrimination that affected minority women.

Danish women dress in formal Western outfits for business meetings and wear casual dress including jeans, leather jackets, and T-shirts for social activities.

Legal Rights

The Danish Constitution guarantees the complete legal equality of men and women in all areas. Danish women have had the right to vote and run for office since 1915. Women are also allowed to own and inherit property. The government passed gender equality laws in 1980 in order to raise the status of women to a level of parity with men.

In Denmark, abortion can be legally performed at a hospital by a doctor or with the consent of an approved committee.

Danish women have the right to initiate divorces on many grounds, including adultery and mutual consent. The custody of children can be mutually decided by the couple, or it can be granted by judicial decision.

Education

Denmark offers free and compulsory education for ages 7 to 16. Girls and boys study together under the coeducational

system. An equal proportion of girls and boys enroll at the primary level, while girls have outnumbered boys at secondary and university levels. The literacy rate of Danish women and men is equal at 99 percent.

Female educational levels are noticeably improving in Denmark, and almost 50 percent of college students are now female. Men generally take up studies in technology and science, while women tend to opt for social sciences and health.

Danish women have access to equal job opportunities and equal pay, and recently they have prevailed over men in medicine and the health sector.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Danish women have the liberty to choose their own spouses. In fact, Denmark was the first country in the world to legalize gay and lesbian marriages in 1989.

Danish culture allows dating, and young people usually meet in educational, professional, social, and religious gatherings. The legal marriage age is 18, but, on average, women marry at just over 30 years of age, more than two years earlier than men. Cohabitation and consensual sex at a young age is increasing in Denmark.

Primarily, women take the responsibility of all familial activities and men fulfill the economic needs of the house. Nowadays, couples equally share the household responsibilities. Legislation allows women to hold assets separate from their husbands. Also, Danish women have the right to retain their maiden names after marriage.

In case of a divorce, women are entitled to a share in the family property and they can also remarry. When the judiciary decides upon child custody, it ensures that the custodial parent receives sufficient child maintenance from the non-custodial parent.

Health

The Danish government offers free and equal access to healthcare services for all its citizens. Free counseling is available to pregnant women regarding nutrition, diet, and good maternal care. As a result, the average mortality rates are only 10 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births and 4.5 infant deaths per 1,000 live births.

Danish women can make their own healthcare decisions, including family planning and the usage of contraceptives. Easy access to birth control methods and free abortions have reduced the number of unwanted pregnancies, particularly among teenagers.

Interesting Social Customs

Danish “Shrovetides” customs, which take place on the three days before Ash Wednesday, used to involve farmers whipping women and female animals with willow or birch rods to boost their fertility. This custom has endured in the form of colored Shrovetide rods that are adorned with sweets and given as gifts.

Women in Business

General View

Denmark has the world's highest female workforce participation rate with approximately 78 percent of all women employed outside the home and an additional percentage of women actively involved in running their own businesses. Gender equality is also remarkably advanced in Denmark, and government has deployed an array of innovative approaches to build on their progress including the requirement for employers of ten employees or more to compile wage statistics by gender.

The stunning prosperity of Denmark, which has allowed it to set up a large social “safety net,” and their move from an agricultural to a service economy, has made it easier for women to expand beyond their traditional roles as homemakers. The public sector, which employs a third of all Danes, employs many women and has extremely progressive healthcare and childcare provisions including: paid time off for several weeks before a woman gives birth and several months after delivery; the ability to take paid leave to care for a sick child; and the ability to work from home (in some cases).

The government is still trying, however, to increase representation in academia, managerial positions in the public sector, and in business as a whole. One recent step toward these goals was to implement quotas to increase the number of women on the boards of directors of private companies to 40 percent.

Women represent 38 percent of the members of Parliament and accounted for 44 percent of those elected to public council boards and committees, giving Denmark one of the world's highest percentages of female participation in government. Minority women are far less likely to hold a job (40 percent) and more likely to fall victim to domestic violence or coercion into an unwanted marriage.

Legal Rights

The constant review and reform of the Danish Constitution has given women equal rights under family law, property law, and elsewhere in the judicial system. Denmark gave women the right to vote and to participate in elections in 1915. Danish women can inherit property equally from their parents and spouses and have the right to own and run businesses independently. Legislation guarantees women equal remuneration rights, and wage disparity is relatively low in Denmark, with female workers earning about 14 percent less than their male counterparts. Gender equality has actually gone so far that Danish women prisoners can now request to be incarcerated in a mixed gender correctional facility.

Women in Professions

Most rural Danish women (a small minority of the overall population) have jobs in the agricultural sector, while urban women have occupations in the service sector,

particularly retail and transport, finance/business services, and health and social services.

Women have had difficulty breaking into managerial positions in the private sector and represent only five percent of senior managers in the business. A couple of notable exceptions are in the fashion design business, Pernille Leshly Halle gave up a career in the law to establish Style Butler (Asia) Sdn. Bhd. in 2004 with her sister and now she exports her products worldwide. Naja Munthe and Karen Simonsen also launched a fashion business under the brand Munte plus Simosen in over 200 shops in 15 countries. They jointly received the Veuve Clicquot “Business Woman of the Year” award in 2004 for their outstanding performance at a global level.

The Constitution does not expressly prohibit women from doing any particular job including military combat, although the Navy's elite Frogman Corps and the Army's Special Forces do not accept women. (Women make up only three percent of the Danish military). Prostitution is legal for adult women who do not involve a pimp.

Danish women dress formally in fashionably cut suits and shoes for work and wear casual Western European styles on social occasions.

Local authorities provide public childcare in the form of crèches and nurseries to help working women. Private childcare services are strictly regulated and provide quality service with a subsidized fee structure.

Women as Business Owners

Danish women prefer employment to entrepreneurship, and they represent only 33 percent of total business owners. Women entrepreneurs have a strong presence in trade and the hospitality industry and constitute 34 percent of retail traders. They also engage themselves in business services like management consultancy, auditing and bookkeeping, and translation services. The major problems women face in starting businesses include lack of industrial training, access to credit, and their family responsibilities.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Danish people have always respected women in business and can be expected to heartily welcome foreign businesswomen. Danes behave formally when it comes to business and expect the same from foreigners. They tend to get right down to business in an initial meeting and will make their expectations explicit in direct and open communication. Since Danes give conscientious attention to details, it is better to bring all the details of the project on paper to speed up the negotiation process. Always make prior appointments and stick to schedules, as Danes give great importance to punctuality.

Foreign businesswomen can feel free to arrange business lunches with men, but business dinners should generally be avoided. When invited for dinners, remember that the man seated to the left of the hostess usually offers a toast of thanks during the dessert course.

Foreign businesswomen should preferably dress elegantly in suits and other dresses with minimal accessories.

Djibouti

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditional *Afar* and *Issa* culture, as well as Islamic *Shari'a* laws, assign gender roles to Djiboutian women that accord men prominence in public, business, and political life. Women have fewer employment opportunities, mostly due to pervasive poverty and illiteracy, but are economically active as low-paid civil servants and as petty traders, mostly in the informal sector. They are under-represented in important sectors like politics and medicine, although not in the field of law, where a third of all judges are women.

Djiboutian women do not wear veils. Married *Afar* women put on a black headscarf, but urban women wear Western clothes.

Legal Rights

Djiboutian women won the right to vote in 1946 and the right to run for office in 1986. They have legal equality with men and possess full civil rights. Although the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, customary laws give women fewer rights in relation to divorce, inheritance, travel, and other issues. Acts of violence against women, such as rape and child abuse, are usually dealt with by the family or clan rather than by law enforcement officials. Increasingly, women are seeking legal protection to protect their interests.

Abortion is generally illegal except when performed for therapeutic reasons.

The Family Code Law of 2002 replaced the customary Islamic *Shari'a* code in family and personal matters to an extent, granting women and children certain rights and prohibiting child marriages.

Men and women have an equal right to initiate divorce. Women may not be granted custody of the children under *Shari'a* law. They have visitation rights if they are not granted custody.

Education

Over half the population is illiterate in Djibouti. Literacy rates among girls are around 32 percent, compared to 60 percent among boys. Most schools in the countryside are Koranic schools. Government efforts have raised the number of female students to 50 percent, but only in the primary grades. Both single-sex and coeducational schools exist in Djibouti.

Lower educational levels for girls lead to poorer employment opportunities for women.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Only non-Muslims can have a civil marriage. Lineage and ethnicity are important factors for arranged marriages in Djibouti. Marriages between patrilineal cross-cousins are common among the *Afar* and other ethnic groups in rural areas, as is child marriage. The mean age of marriage for women is 19 years.

Polygamy is accepted among Muslims, particularly the Somalis. Each wife raises her own children and performs a specific task such as farming or herding.

According to the Constitution, women can own assets separate from their husbands. Under prevailing customary laws, women experience discrimination with respect to property rights, inheritance, divorce, and custody of children.

Djiboutian women generally do not take their husband's name upon marriage. Financial constraints, conflict, and migration have resulted in many female-headed households.

Health

Approximately 37 percent of the population has access to adequate health care in Djibouti. Medical and maternity services are insufficient, as reflected in the high maternal mortality rate of 730 per 100,000 live births. The incidence of female genital mutilation is very high, at about 98 percent. Life expectancy is very low, about 53 years for women and 49 years for men. Infant mortality is also very high, at 103.3 deaths per 1,000 live births. About nine percent of women use contraception.

Women in Business

General View

Women in Djibouti constitute 32 percent of the workforce and are a force to be reckoned with in the national economy. In the urban formal sector, they are concentrated in clerical and administrative work. Rural women are mostly involved in raising livestock. Women legally possess full civil rights, but traditional societal discrimination in education dictates that they play a secondary role in public life and have fewer employment opportunities than men. Women are largely confined to trade and secretarial fields with a few in managerial and professional positions. The government has several plans to uplift women's position by creating more opportunities for education and employment.

Legal Rights

All citizens in the state of Djibouti have the right to vote. The 2002 Family Code replaced *Sharia'a* laws in matters relating to family and personal issues, although customary laws usually still prevail. Male children inherit a greater share of the property, but educated women are increasingly challenging this practice.

Women in the private sector receive lower wages than men. Even in professions such as teaching, and administration, men earn more.

Women in Professions

Poverty is a major barrier to women's rights and professional development. The education and employment levels of girls are much lower than those of boys. Rural women engage in the traditional occupations of herding and weaving.

Despite the legal provisions on equal participation, women are not found in decision-making positions in the public sector and make up only nine percent of government officials. They are particularly under-represented in the finance, defense, and foreign affairs ministries. Women managers in administration typically make it only as far as department heads or assistant directors. Djiboutian women are, however, well represented in the judiciary, where one-third of all judges in the country are women. The percentage of women in clerical positions in the judiciary is also higher than men and continues to increase.

The Ministry of Women, Family, and Social Affairs is headed by the country's first female minister, Hawa Ahmed Youssouf, and has intensified efforts to improve health and education services for women and children. Prominent women in politics and business include Kadra Mahamoud Haïd, Aicha Mohamed Robleh, Sarah Hussein, Samira Hussein, and Goumati Ahmed, the president of ACP.

Women are not barred from any professions in Djibouti, but there are some limitations on women doing night work. Women in Djibouti do not wear veils as in many other Muslim countries. They have no dress code

restrictions except that they are required to dress modestly without revealing legs and shoulders.

Family members or the local community look after the children of working mothers. There are hardly any state-run childcare centers in Djibouti.

Women as Business Owners

It is estimated that more than 80 percent of Djiboutian enterprises fall into the informal and semi-informal sectors. Most of the informal micro-businesses are owned and managed by women. Efforts to induce more women to take up entrepreneurship by offering them more credit facilities at the micro-enterprise level have indeed improved the position of female entrepreneurs. Women engage in production cooperatives in sectors of agriculture, fishery, crafts, and tourism.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen may find it tough to break the cordon of male domination in Djibouti.

The city of Djibouti is the only venue for international business. Despite the heat, business people dress rather formally, especially at initial meetings. A working knowledge of French or Arabic is required in Djibouti, since English is rarely spoken and translation services are rare.

Dominican Republic

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In the Dominican Republic, women are expected to assume the traditional role of homemakers in their male-dominated society. Middle- and upper-class households are headed by the father or the oldest male family member, while lower-class families follow a matriarchal system in which the father sometimes does not even live in the house. Gender roles are learned at an early age, when girls are taught to be gentle and passive, to dress modestly, and to always be chaperoned.

There has been a marked change in attitudes toward female employment in recent years, however. Women have attained success in all fields and hold high-level management positions—even the country's Vice-President is a woman. Today, women hold 15 percent of the total seats in Parliament, constitute 31 percent of administrators and managers, and make up nearly 50 percent of the technical and professional workforce.

Ethnicity affects the position of women in Dominican society, since the elite are primarily of European ancestry and people of African ancestry are generally poorer. There is a huge gap between the rich and poor in the country, so more affluent women have a far wider range of opportunities than the rest of the society.

Dominican women wear modern, Western-style outfits. They dress in stylish suits and dresses and tend to wear a fair amount of make-up and jewelry.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of the Dominican Republic provides women the right to vote and run for political office. They have rights to own property, including agricultural lands. Abortion remains illegal except in cases when the pregnancy might affect the mother's health.

Women can initiate divorces very easily, one reason for the high rate of divorce in the Dominican Republic. In most cases, women are granted child custody.

Education

Dominican women have equal access to free and mandatory education through the high school level. Both genders share equal classroom space. The literacy rate of men and women is the same, at 84 percent. Dropout rates are, however, higher among girls.

In general, women do not get job opportunities corresponding to their level of education.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Dominicans have three accepted forms of marriages: religious, civil, and free union. Civil marriages are generally preferred. Social class plays a major role in deciding the type of marriage. The middle-class and upper-class groups favor religious marriages, which reflect their privileged status.

Dominican women have freedom to date and to choose a life partner. Dating usually starts at the age of 15. Young people meet at discotheques and at social gatherings. The minimum age of marriage is 15 for a woman and 16 for a

man. A woman usually takes her husband's surname on marriage and usually does not retain it upon divorce.

Although laws prohibit polygamy, Dominican people tend to socially accept extramarital *liaisons*.

Men are still considered the head of the household, yet educated and employed women have more authority and independence. They have the right to hold assets of their own, but generally require the husband's permission to dispose of the property. In case of free unions, women do not have any rights to claim property when they part, because the man owns the property legally.

Health

Dominican women have equal access to the country's inadequate health care facilities. Despite antenatal visits in hospitals and health centers, mortality rates are still 220 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births and 31 infant deaths per 1,000 births. Over 98 percent of births are attended by health care providers.

The contraceptive prevalence rate was around 70 percent in 2003. Most women choose sterilization as the means of birth control, perhaps due to the meager availability of temporary methods. Dominican women generally prefer to marry young, have children in succession, and then opt for sterilization.

Interesting Social Customs

A Dominican woman has to wait ten months after her divorce before she can remarry, except when she is remarrying her first husband.

Women in Business

General View

Dominican women make up most of the workers in the labor force, are the majority of students at university, and play a major role in the community and in politics. The percentage of working women has risen from 43 percent in 1996 to 49 percent in 1999 due to increased public sector hiring of women and the many industries established in free trade zones. In addition, 11 percent of all working women are self-employed. Women also occupy many respected management positions, including the vice president of the country and 90 percent of provincial governorships.

However, despite laws assuring gender-equality in all spheres of life and great improvements in the lifestyles of women, the generally chauvinistic attitude of Dominicans towards women still persists. Regardless of the job a woman holds, she is still expected to take care of all domestic matters. Women of lower classes in rural areas usually get low-paying jobs to support their households, including their often jobless husbands.

Legal Rights

Dominican women have had the legal right to vote since 1942 and are allowed to run businesses and to inherit property. In reality, women do not enjoy the same status as men in this conservative Catholic society, and they seldom get as many opportunities as men. Men inherit a major portion of the family legacy, while a woman is considered fit to inherit it only if she is the head of the family.

Female workers get paid less than their male colleagues for the same kind of jobs, in spite of laws prohibiting gender-discrimination in pay.

Women in Professions

The Dominican Republic is famous for its tobacco industry, which employs a large number of women. Dominican women also work in the tourism industry and often take the assistance of public and private establishments to set up little businesses.

A few prominent Dominican women achievers include: Linita Shih, a member of the Dominican Republic Organization of Women in International Trade; Mercedes P. de Canalda, Maritza Carvajal, and Claribel Diaz, the president, vice president, and secretary of the NGO ADOPEM which runs the ADOPEM Savings and Credit Bank.

Women are not permitted to work in ferro-nickel and gold mining jobs. Dominican women dress like Western women with long skirts and blouses, and they wear dresses or business suits for formal occasions.

Usually older siblings or grandparents take care of the children of working women. A number of government agencies, such as the Dominican Social Security Institute and the National Council for Children, have made considerable efforts to help working women by opening many childcare centers since 1981. The government is also encouraging the setting up of suitable child-care centers within companies that employ large number of women.

Women as Business Owners

Women own around 45 percent of the micro-industries and small businesses in the Dominican Republic. These entrepreneurs own 13 percent of manufacturing industries and 13 percent of small service businesses but are under-represented in finance and transport businesses. In female-owned enterprises, around 65 percent of the employees are women compared to only 15 percent of women employees in businesses owned by men. The average annual rate of growth of employment in businesses run by women is 6 percent, while it is 9 percent in businesses owned by men. Though many Dominican women are into business and have excelled in higher positions such as industrial management, a majority of them work in jobs that pay less and not equal to their education.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Dominicans behave very politely to foreigners and foreign investors. Foreign businesswomen are very much respected and welcomed with utmost graciousness. Business deals happen over lunch, dinner, or a game of golf. When dining out at a business or a social function, Dominicans tend to dress in a fairly formal manner. In business settings, both men and women dress rather conservatively, with skirts and blouses, and suits. Punctuality is expected and appreciated by the Dominicans. Arriving around 15 to 30 minutes late for social functions is considered on time. Make sure that you have all business materials written or printed in both English and Spanish. Businesswomen visiting the Dominican Republic should always remember that all spheres of life in the country are dominated by men, and men are likely to resent what they perceive as overly aggressive women.

Ecuador

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Ecuadorian women are brought up to be mothers first and foremost. They face discrimination in many areas of Ecuador's paternal culture. Ecuadorian women often have limited access to education and employment, and violence against women is a persistent problem.

Until the 1980s, a woman's place was clearly within the home. Today, roles are changing, and Ecuadorian women have more freedom in public life. Women's participation in politics has increased. In the 2002 elections, 15 women took places in the 100-seat Congress, and three women received cabinet posts. Ecuadorian women are not well represented in the legal field, however. In 1996, only one of 31 Supreme Court judges was a woman. The number of female judges in other Ecuadorian courts is also low, though they occupy more seats in the labor and landlord-tenant courts, about 34 percent and 50 percent, respectively.

Ecuadorian women are more active in business, though they tend to be involved in very specific sectors like food and beverages, clothing, and beauty services. The number of women business owners or high-level executives remains small. About 43 percent of Ecuadorian physicians between the ages of 25 and 34 are women. The number of female physicians declines with the increase in age, though, and only three percent of all physicians over 45 years of age are women.

Rural women receive about 35 percent less income than men doing comparable work. The situation is improving with the establishment of a council for indigenous groups, which has created credit, training, and development assistance programs for rural women. Women from higher social strata usually have better access to education, employment and healthcare.

Each sub-culture in Ecuador has a unique way of treating its women, with some of them following a patriarchal form of society, others following rules of strict equality, and still others preferring a matriarchal type of society.

There are no dress code restrictions for Ecuadorian women. Traditional dress consists of a white blouse, a blue skirt, and a shawl, worn with a lot of jewelry. Urban women dress in Western-style clothing.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of Ecuador expressly provides women with all the legal rights of men. Practically speaking, though, discrimination persists.

Ecuador was the first Latin American country to grant women the right to vote in 1929. Ecuadorian women also have the legal right to own and inherit property.

Abortion is illegal in Ecuador and can be performed only to save a woman's life, or when the pregnancy is the result of the rape or deception of an insane or retarded woman. A woman is not eligible for an abortion if she possesses her full mental faculties and is pregnant as the result of rape. Illegal abortions are relatively common.

Women may initiate divorce. Child custody is decided by mutual agreement or, when that isn't possible, by court order, and women have equal rights to custody of their children.

Education

Under Ecuadorian law, women have the same rights to education as men. In recent years, a number of programs have attempted to bring women into the mainstream of Ecuadorian society and to increase their participation at all levels of education. This has resulted in adult literacy rates of 91 percent for women, as compared to 94 percent for men.

Although most girls attend primary school, only about half enroll in secondary education. Ecuadorian children of both genders share the same classroom space.

Though Ecuador's constitution provides women with equal employment opportunities, discrimination does exist, with many educated women denied appropriate job opportunities. Women are generally steered towards "feminized" jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In most social classes, women are allowed to choose their own mates, though some indigenous cultures have different systems, like trial marriages and serial polygyny. Polygamy is against Ecuadorian law and is not generally practiced, but it is still common in some tribes such as the Jivaro, who live in remote areas of the country.

Ecuadorian girls normally start dating at 15, after a "coming out" party. Ecuadorian women normally meet men at social events, school, or in the workplace. The legal marriage age in Ecuador is 18, but many Ecuadorian girls get married earlier with the consent of their parents. The average age of first marriage is just under 23 for women, and a little under 25 for men.

Men are traditionally the head of the household, although women have the freedom to make important decisions in many families. Women can legally hold assets separately from their husbands. Ecuadorian women take their husband's names when they marry. After divorce, women revert to their maiden names.

It is considered bad for an Ecuadorian woman to be childless, and the inability to bear children is grounds for divorce in Ecuador. In the event of a divorce, women are usually granted custody of the children.

Health

Women have equal access to medical and healthcare facilities in Ecuador, but standards of medical care need improvement. Professional healthcare workers attend only 69 percent of births. Maternal mortality rates are estimated to be about 130 per 100,000 births, while the infant mortality rate is about 22.87 per 1,000.

Women from higher social classes are usually allowed to make their own healthcare decisions, while women from lower social classes have their healthcare decisions made for them by their spouses or other members of the family.

Only 66 percent of married women of childbearing age use contraceptives. The Ecuadorian government has acknowledged the need for effective family planning programs, and access to birth control is improving.

Interesting Social Customs

In Ecuadorian traditional society, homes were divided into male and female living areas. Some tribes even had separate doors for men and women to use when entering a house.

Women in Business

General View

Women in Ecuador, especially those in urban areas, are progressing towards higher levels of responsibility and parity with men due to their improved educational status and affirmative action programs, which have given women job quotas in industries. The role of women in areas like agriculture (where they work side by side equally with men), domestic labor, and market trading has, however, not changed much over the years. For most women, their working lives start early; the average age of the working woman in Ecuador is under 30.

Legal Rights

Ecuador was the first Latin American country to grant women the right to vote back in 1929. Only 50 percent of women, however, actually exercised this right in the 2004 elections. Ecuadorian women also have the right to own businesses and inherit real property. However, a significant pay difference exists between men and women; women's average salary was only 65 percent of men's in 1997.

The male domination of government, judicial, and legislative positions has slackened after election law reforms, which led to 27 percent representation for women in local elections. The government has admitted that although growth in the position of women in the public sector has occurred, employers generally do not prefer women employees due to requirements to give women benefits like maternity leave.

Women in Professions

Housekeeping and pastoral work are the traditional occupations of Ecuadorian women. These days women are well represented in the professions and many women hold high positions in business. Joyce De Ginatta, for instance, is a very popular lecturer and entrepreneur. Magdalena Adoum serves as the leader of the Women in Communication Network, which is fighting corruption in Ecuadorian government.

Women are given full freedom under the law to take up the same jobs as men and work in any profession they choose, irrespective of the conditions of the workplace. The ban on women working at night has been removed. And women also have no dress code restrictions; they dress in the traditional Latin/European style.

Generally, an adolescent daughter of a friend or a neighbor will take care of the children of working mothers. Many Ecuadorian families have maidservants to help with the household chores and also take care of the children on a permanent basis. The state sponsors a national network of daycare centers of Ecuador (*Organización de*

Rescate Infantil) and The Ecuador Volunteer Placement School and Day Care Center for Indigenous Children. These centers offer free education for the local children as well as childcare.

Women as Business Owners

Women have played an important role in Ecuador's economic development through small businesses and activities carried out in the local marketplaces. Reaching high positions in business and professions has been an uphill task for many women. Although attitudes are slowly changing and women are getting more respect and understanding in society, many men still resent taking orders from women.

Eighty-five percent of women entrepreneurs own small businesses like fast-food restaurants, beverage production, and beauty parlors, generating a lot of employment opportunities for other women. The rest are found in the clothing business and small-scale trading.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign women have no problems doing business in Ecuador. Ecuadorians are a very friendly, polite people who are proud of their country and its values, but are open-minded to the ideas and opinions of foreigners. Generally speaking, people from the uplands tend to be more conservative than people from coastal regions.

Handshaking is common between men, while women kiss each other on the cheeks. Take care and dress in a formal way for business appointments. Elderly people and higher authorities must be given proper respect. It is not advisable to address any person by his or her first name until you get to know the person very well. Discussing business over lunch is very common (breakfast meetings are not). The person who gives the invitation usually pays the bill.

Women, even when traveling alone in Ecuador, generally do not face any problems with safety, although Ecuadorian men occasionally do make comments to women in public.

Egypt

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Modern Egyptian women have more freedom than ever before to choose between filling the role of a traditional housewife and working for wages outside the home. Still, only about one quarter of women work, and most of their jobs are in the service sector and agriculture. Another 12 percent of women are employed in manufacturing as workers in the textile, food processing, and pharmaceutical industries, although the number of new jobs for women in manufacturing has been declining. Highly educated women are employed in medicine, law, and business. Women make up 4.3 percent of the members of Parliament, 31 percent of professionals, and 9 percent of managers. Women also own 17 percent of businesses in Egypt, mostly small firms in the service sector. There is one female judge in the present judicial setup.

There are no major cultural differences for women among Egypt's ethnic groups. Regionally, employment prospects are much better around Cairo and Alexandria, where 80 percent of new jobs are found.

Many women wear Western clothing, but Muslim traditions require women to wear long dresses that cover their body fully from head to toe, as well as head scarves to cover their hair. Copts, Bedouins, Nubians, and Fellahins all have their own specific styles of dress.

Legal Rights

The Egyptian women have equal legal rights as men, including the right to vote, own property, and inherit a husband's property upon his death.

Domestic violence is pervasive in Egypt, where 35 percent of women have reported being beaten by their husbands. Furthermore, almost half of all women's murders were cases in which a relative murdered someone suspected of sexual impropriety in order to clear the family name.

It is illegal to perform an abortion even if the life of the woman is at risk.

A woman can obtain a divorce if her husband is suffering from a serious, incurable defect. Divorced women have to return the dowry to the husband and also relieve him of any financial obligations in the future. The divorced mother gets the custody of her children until the boys are 10 and the girls are 12. The limit can be extended to 15 years for boys and until marriage for girls. Children can obtain Egyptian nationality only from the father.

Education

The female literacy rate is 45 percent, and rural women are less literate than their urban counterparts. Women receive higher education in humanities, education, social sciences, and medicine. Co-educational institutions are very common in Egypt.

Educated women have many job opportunities, even at higher levels, at banks, universities, newspapers, and

government ministries. The percentage of employed women has increased from 18 percent in 1996 to 31 percent in 2004.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Parents or matchmakers traditionally arranged weddings, but many young people choose their own life partners these days. Dating is not practiced in the Western sense because of prevalent Islamic attitudes. Many young people get to meet and interact with the opposite sex at work places, colleges, and parties without parental supervision. The legal marriage age is 18 for males and 16 for females. Polygamy is allowed with the permission of the existing wives.

Most women continue to use their maiden names after marriage, but their passports must have their husband's name. Women do all the household chores including childcare. Childlessness in women is not tolerated in a traditional Muslim household.

A divorced mother gets the custody of her children until the age of 10 for boys and 12 for girls. Women can own the property inherited from their parents or husbands and also assets they earned themselves.

Health

Women have access to health care services provided by the government. Egypt has strong policies regarding the health and safety of mothers, including immunization policies, but mandated services are more consistently available in urban areas than they are in rural areas. Many births in rural areas are attended by midwives.

Women have access to antenatal care like immunization and some family planning methods, but they are not allowed to make their own healthcare decisions. Egypt was the first Muslim country to launch a family planning program, in 1966. By the mid-1980s, the birth rate had dropped significantly and contraceptive use was very high among women.

Interesting Social Customs

Over 97 percent of Egyptian girls, usually aged 9 to 12, are forced to undergo female genital mutilation.

Women in Business

General View

Egyptian women, particularly the upper and middle class, were traditionally confined to the roles of mother and wife. The early 1970s witnessed a change in the status of women, and women joined the non-agricultural workforce in increasing numbers. According to government estimates, the number of working women doubled between 1978 and 1980 and made up almost 14 percent of all wage-earning/ salaried employees in the country. In spite of fair representation in the professions, particularly education, engineering, and medicine, a majority of women held low-paying jobs in factories, offices, and

service industries: as cleaners, janitors, hospitality, domestic and healthcare staff.

The new generation of women and women's organizations are striving to uphold women's equal rights within the household, the economy, and the labor market; and this new attitude is reflected in the words of Abel-Hadi, labor force minister who said, "The empowerment of the Egyptian women and the community should go hand in hand."

Legal Rights

Egyptian women were given the right to vote in 1956, and a bill also allowed them to be nominated to the National Assembly. The Constitution guarantees equal access to social security, education, employment and work opportunities, and gender equality in pay. Egyptian civil law, in accordance with Islamic law, gives women the right to own, administer, and inherit property without a male representative. Egyptian women can acquire real property as gifts or as an inheritance from their parents or husband or via direct purchases. The property law allows woman a claim of one-third of all the community property (possessions acquired by herself and her husband during a marriage). When a woman brings her own private property to a marriage (e.g., as a dowry), this remains hers, although the husband has access to it. In the event of divorce, the woman can stake claim to her property.

While all these provisions exist on paper, discrimination may arise from strongly rooted traditions and the lack of strict implementation of laws. Women also face problems like lack of awareness of their rights and limited access to credit. Women also do not have the same legal rights as men in terms of personal status (marriage, divorce, child custody), and they have no right to pass on their nationality to their children.

Equal pay applies only in the formal sector, while women in the informal sector receive lower pay than men.

Women in Professions

The vast majority of Egyptian women work in the service and agricultural sectors. Increasing opportunities for women have opened up a variety of careers to them, and many women have made it to the very top of these careers as bank CEOs, newspaper editors, university deans, and government ministers. Prominent female leaders in Egypt include Hala Khalil, a filmmaker and successful film director who gave up her engineering studies to enroll at the Cairo Film Institute much against the wishes of her conservative family; Tahani El-Gebali, a judge on the Supreme Constitutional Court, who has had a successful tenure of 30 years in commercial, civil, criminal, and family law; and Jehan Sadat, widow of the late president Anwar Sadat and founder of the Talla Society (an early example of micro financing for a women's sewing cooperative), the African-Arab Women's League, and the Wafa' Wal Amal Society, which operates a rehabilitation community for handicapped war veterans.

Egyptian women are not barred from any professions except that they do face some restrictions in night work in certain sectors. They are not subject to any dress code restrictions.

Caring for children is a woman's primary responsibility, and many Egyptian women strictly adhere to the Koranic principle to breast-feed children for two years. Grandparents and other members of the extended family

actively participate in bringing up children. In some cases, live-in-nannies, babysitters, or daycare centers are sought to help with childcare.

Women as Business Owners

Women do not form a sizable portion of Egypt's entrepreneurial class. Egyptian women run 18 percent of micro, small, and medium enterprises. Women-owned enterprises are still concentrated in the micro enterprise sector, with a mere three percent in the small and medium enterprise sector. Among the major private companies, there is approximately 10-15 percent female ownership. This figure may not be the actual one, as family businesses are often registered in the woman's name to enable the male to retain state employment, or to reduce taxation.

Research reveals that Egyptian women face more difficulty than men in accessing markets, business resources, and credit. Gender-related barriers also restrict their business to the less productive informal sector. This results in fewer, smaller, and less competitive female-owned enterprises.

The WIF (women's initiative fund), jointly set up by the foundation for International Training and Egypt's Ministry of Social Affairs, was created to prepare low-income women entrepreneurs and their families for the business world. During the last decade, it has provided credit to several thousand poor women and also helped kick-start more than 200 new small and medium businesses. These businesses produce a variety of things from dairy products to plastic pipes to hosiery.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Steer clear of discussing politics, religion, or intimate personal matters with Egyptian business associates. Even with a businessperson of close association, discussions can be taken only as far as the general welfare of one's family. Never make the *faux pas* of offering tips to government officials and business people, they are highly averse to such a practice and consider it unprofessional. The use of some simple Arabic phrases is a courtesy that is always appreciated. Avoid gesticulations since some many hand gestures are considered rude. Also refrain from making eye contact or making any gesture that conveys intimacy with an associate of opposite sex.

El Salvador

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Machismo pervades El Salvadorian culture, so it's expected that women should be wives and mothers rather than equal partners in life. Like many Latin American cultures, El Salvador is a patriarchal society. El Salvadorian women have little social and financial independence and rarely own businesses or assume leadership roles. Women from all social classes and economic groups are taught that their place is at home.

The status of women in El Salvador is slowly changing. More women have joined the workforce in recent years, though economic decline has limited the number of job opportunities open to women. The introduction of a new Family Code in 1993 addressed some laws that were discriminatory to women, especially those in common law marriages.

Women are only 26 percent of legislators, senior officials, and managers in El Salvador. Women do have an increasing presence in politics, where nine of the 84 legislators are women, and the Vice President is also a woman. Women are estimated to make up 40 percent of the country's judges, though most of them hold positions in the lower level courts. Two of the 15 Supreme Court judges are women.

Women business owners and women who hold high-level executive positions remain few. Women are involved in agriculture, food production, and food processing. They take an active role in the fields, performing jobs such as planting, fertilizing, harvesting, processing, storage, and marketing. El Salvadorian women are also slowly making their presence felt in other areas of business, such as small and medium-scale enterprises.

The role and view of women is not noticeably different in the rural and urban areas of El Salvador, but access to education, employment and healthcare is more limited in rural areas. The role of women varies little in El Salvador's sub-cultures like *mestizos*, whites, and Amerindians.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for women. Women usually wear skirts and dresses, though in the capital of San Salvador, women dress quite fashionably.

Legal Rights

El Salvador's Constitution provides women the same legal rights as men in all respects and forbids discrimination. In practice, though, discrimination against women is pervasive.

El Salvador granted its women the right to vote in 1939. El Salvadorian women can also own and inherit property. In 1997, new laws removed all exceptions to the country's prohibition against abortion, making it difficult to end a pregnancy even to save a woman's life.

Women may file for divorce only if they can show that they are not the cause for the breakdown in the marriage. Custody of the children may be granted to either spouse, depending on an agreement reached through mutual consent or, in the case of a contested divorce, by the judge.

Education

El Salvador's Constitution provides women with the right to basic, free public education. The adult literacy rate for women is almost 78 percent, as compared to nearly 83 percent for men.

Most El Salvadorian women do receive a basic education, especially in rural areas, where many girls leave school after or during primary school. In 1993, women comprised 48.7 percent of all those who received higher education. El Salvadorian children of both genders share the same classroom space.

Women have the legal right to the same job opportunities as men, but discrimination remains widespread. Women usually work in the service sector and are often passed over for promotions and management-level positions. In urban areas, many women work unskilled jobs, which offer comparatively more opportunities and better pay than work in rural areas. All told, women make up about 46 percent of professional and technical workers in El Salvador, but earn only about 36 percent of what men earn.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Most El Salvadorian women are allowed to choose their own spouses. The most common type of union is an informal one, where a man and a woman live together and have children without a legal ceremony or church service. El Salvadorian laws recognize these types of unions. Polygamy, however, is a crime and is not socially acceptable.

Girls normally begin to date when they're about 15 years old. Women meet men at schools, in workplaces, and at social events. El Salvadorian women do not change their names after marriage.

The legal marriage age for women is 18, though those under 18 years of age are legally allowed to marry if they already have a child together or if the girl is pregnant. In this case, the couple must obtain the consent of their parents or, if the parents are not available, the consent of the closest relatives. The average age for El Salvadorian women marrying for the first time is 22, compared to 25 for men.

Men are usually household heads in El Salvadorian culture. Though the Constitution of El Salvador grants women the right to own property separately from their husbands, El Salvadorian women do not have equal access to property because of social prejudices. However, with single parent families becoming more common, more women are heading their own households.

It's considered important for women to be mothers, so childlessness is frowned on. In the event of a divorce, the spouses may reach a mutual agreement regarding custody of the children. However, if a divorce is contested, a judge decides child custody.

Health

El Salvador's Constitution provides women with equal access to healthcare and medical facilities. Public health services are often poor, with most clinics and hospitals facing shortages of medicine and supplies. In 1994, only

60 percent of El Salvador's pregnant women received any prenatal care, and about 43 percent of pregnant women suffered from anemia. Maternal mortality rate for the year 2000 was 150 per 100,000 live births. More recent estimates show that 90 percent of births were attended by a skilled healthcare professional, so the situation may be improving. Nevertheless, the infant mortality rate currently stands at 24.39 deaths per 1,000.

Although surveys show that most El Salvadorian women feel that they should be allowed to make their own healthcare decisions, in reality, it is the men of the household who have the final say. Family planning services in El Salvador are available through the Ministry of Health and the Social Security Institute of El Salvador (ISSS). About 60 percent of married women of childbearing age were using contraceptives between 1995 and 2005. However, contraceptive use has come in for criticism from the Catholic Church, which has a strong influence on most El Salvadorians.

Interesting Social Customs

A custom found mainly in rural areas of El Salvador is that during times when food is scarce, girls are expected to eat less, allowing larger portions for the males, who are the providers for the family.

Women in Business

General View

Long years of conflict and hardship prepared El Salvadorian women for many non-domestic roles. In fact, it is estimated that some 30 percent of women actively participated in the armed conflict. After the war, equipped with few skills and little training, women took up a variety of jobs that circumstances offered. Many women initially concentrated in the agricultural sector because it offered relatively more employment opportunities and adequate income. From agriculture, women expanded into other related areas like processing, packing, storing, marketing, and retail and wholesale outlets.

The end of civil war found many women as heads of households, and as working outside the home became a necessity, social taboos faded. The garment industry hired many more semi-skilled women in the 1990s and early 2000s, but that industry is now shrinking. Today, many El Salvadorian women hold high-level posts in government, education, law, medicine, media, and technology, while the majority still struggle for the economic stability that will allow them to get educated (only 44 percent of girls attend school) and break out the cycle of poverty that has held them back.

Legal Rights

Men and women share the same legal rights. They have the right to vote, and there is no law that prevents them from active participation in political or governmental affairs. Women can inherit property from their fathers and husbands, and they also enjoy rights to own personal assets and businesses. In rural El Salvador, women's inheritance is still a subject of debate, and very often women take legal recourse for a fair share of their legacies.

Women are, in addition, confined to the low paying occupational sector where there exist visible pay differences between men and women. However, in the

professional sector, qualifications, and not gender, determine the income-levels. In general, El Salvadorian women earn 35 percent less than men.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Salvadorian women were concentrated in agriculture, which offered jobs in planting, fertilizing, harvesting, packing, marketing, and retailing. Post-secondary school training and diploma programs saw women emerge as teachers, health visitors, clerks, and secretaries. Further educational opportunities allowed women to join men as doctors, lawyers, and technicians. By the year 2000, women held about 9.5 percent of seats in the Legislative Assembly, 33 percent of senior government and managerial jobs, and 47 percent of professional and technical positions, indicating a remarkable progress for Salvadorian women.

Women have held positions as Minister and Vice Minister of Education, Vice Minister of Public Health, Secretary of the Social Investment Fund, Attorney General for the Office for the Defense of Human Rights, and Chairman of the Central Reserve Bank. Teresa Batres is a famous businesswoman in El Salvador. She runs (along with her husband) the vertically integrated company Casa Batres, which grows, processes, and exports coffee.

There are no jobs from which women are barred. Dress codes have never been a matter of concern here, since their traditional dress of skirt and blouse is accepted at all work places, and the practice of uniform, employed by certain companies, has received wide-spread approval by men and women alike. Grandmothers or older siblings generally look after the children of working women by. The affluent and rich female professionals engage nannies or babysitters from within their community. State run childcare centers lack the right infrastructure and staffing.

Women as Business Owners

Women entrepreneurs own small-scale and medium-scale enterprises in the production and marketing of agricultural and dairy products. Women in the urban areas own businesses in garments, fashion designing, computer training centers, cyber cafés, beauty salons, coffee shops, and many more. Some of the garment businesses have expanded to the point where many of their outlets cater only to the rich and famous. Women heads of companies may be few, but women in small- and medium-sized enterprises are successfully expanding and offering more and better employment opportunities to other women.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Locals receive the visiting businesswomen with great warmth and friendliness. The attitude of some men may verge almost on chivalry. The people here believe in building up a relationship based on trust and friendship before undertaking any kind of business deals. Business is generally discussed only after some time spent on small talk or even a lunch, after which everyone disperses to meet again after a *siesta*. Evenings are generally spent in the company of the business hosts. An invitation to meet the family is almost a given, and the visitor may in fact find the entire clan of her business host invited for the evening to meet her. Such a party will often involve some amount of dancing.

Equatorial Guinea

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Equatorial Guinea's traditions and customs have confined women to domestic chores, childrearing, and agricultural activities. Despite legal provisions designed to protect their rights, women suffer from gender-based discrimination in access to education, health, and employment opportunities.

Although women played a considerable role in Equatorial Guinea's fight for independence, their status in society has not changed much since 1968. The patriarchal society clearly values boys more than girls, who are expected to be compliant and passive. Women are often subjected to domestic violence, sexual harassment, and exploitation.

For its part, the government has taken a few steps, including initiating a new way of socializing boys and girls. The government has emphasized policies of equal access for women to basic social services, education and health, equal pay for equal work, equal protection under the law, and equal rights in every area of public life.

Equatorial Guinean women do not have any legal limitations in participating in politics, but societal prejudices have kept women's representation in politics low. Women constitute only 18 percent of the seats in the lower house. In the judiciary, there was one female judge each in the Supreme Court and Appeals Court, besides a female Supreme Court secretary. Four district court judges are women.

Women's participation in Equatorial Guinea's medical field is poor. In business, women predominantly engage in agriculture, freshwater artisanal fisheries, and the informal sector. Women rarely hold senior positions in the private or public sectors.

There is a huge gap between the haves and have-nots in Equatorial Guinea, and women from the upper socio-economic levels of society have far more freedom and opportunities than the average woman in the country. Urban women also have better access to education, healthcare, and employment, making their lives a lot more privileged than rural women's lives.

In the *Fang*, *Ndowe*, *Bissio*, and *Annobonesa* ethnic groups, fathers pass on their inheritance to their sons. In the *Bubi* community, children belong to the wife of the marriage, and inheritance is matrilineal.

Equatorial Guinean women dress smartly in pleated skirts, starched blouses, and polished shoes. There are no particular dress code restrictions for women.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of Equatorial Guinea guarantees women equal rights in all spheres of public, private, and family life. Equatorial Guinean women received the right to vote and to run for election in 1963. Legally, women can inherit property and own assets, but in reality the inheritance practices generally follow the custom of primogeniture, in which the oldest male child is the benefactor.

Legislation permits abortion only to save the life or preserve the physical and mental health of the mother. Legally, abortions are supposed to be performed in a health center by an authorized physician.

According to law, women can initiate divorce. Customary law prevails when it comes to the custody of children. In most ethnic groups, mothers are granted custody of the children until they are seven years old, after which the custody reverts to the fathers.

Education

Equatorial Guinean women have fair access to education, as can be seen by their literacy rate of 78.4 percent. They lag behind men, however, whose literacy rate is 93.3 percent. Boys and girls share the same classroom space in the country's co-educational system of schooling.

Girls tend to drop out at the secondary school level for reasons of early pregnancy, marriage, failure, or the need to find employment. The government is now providing scholarships to girls to encourage girls' education.

Although women are legally guaranteed equal access to job opportunities, most still occupy relatively secondary positions in the economy.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, the parents arranged most marriages in Equatorial Guinea. These days, however, Equatorial Guinean women have greater liberty to choose their own partners.

The practice of dating is not widespread in Equatorial Guinea, but it is present. Social gatherings have traditionally been popular places for women to meet men, but times have changed, and discos and nightclubs are replacing social events in popularity.

The legal age at which an Equatorial Guinean woman can marry is eighteen. Following the traditions of Hispanic culture, Equatorial Guinean women retain their maiden names upon marriage.

In spite of the woman's predominant role in homemaking, a man still is responsible for all his family's needs. Women have legal right to hold assets separate from their husbands, but this rarely takes place in practice.

The country's culture and laws allow the practice of polygamy. Polygamy is common among the *Fang* community and less prevalent in other ethnic groups.

The strong cultural belief that a woman's infertility is related to a curse puts childless Equatorial Guinean women in a wretched condition.

Generally, women are required to return the bride money to the husband upon divorce. In all patrilineal communities, the custody of children vests with the father or his family. In the *Bubi* community, women receive the custody of the children.

Health

In general, women have equal access to the health care system. The reproductive health program concentrates on prenatal care, childbirth, post-natal care, post-abortion

services, family planning, and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Urban women have greater access to healthcare information, family planning techniques, trained professionals, and hospitals with modern equipment than rural women.

The infant mortality rate has gone down over the years and currently stands at 89 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Although women have legal rights to make their own health decisions, it is usually done in consultation with their husbands. Traditionally preferred birth control techniques were prolonged breast-feeding and sexual abstinence. The usage of contraceptives in Equatorial Guinea varies according to the educational level and social class of the couple.

Women in Business

General View

Women in Equatorial Guinea make up more than half the population and perform as much work as men, but only a third of their labor is remunerated and they own only one tenth of the money in circulation.

The principal economic sectors in Equatorial Guinea are agriculture, freshwater artisanal fisheries, oil, and the informal sector. Women outnumber men in the agricultural sector, but play a smaller role in commerce, civil services, and the informal and private sectors. The representation of women at the top levels of the private sector is less than one percent, which is disproportionately low.

There has been no evidence, as yet, of workplace discrimination, and the Government has adopted measures for the advancement of women. These measures include free and preferential vocational training, incentives for enterprises that hire women, and special pregnancy benefits for working women. The informal sector, on the other hand, does not provide social security benefits.

Legal Rights

The Constitution grants women equal rights and opportunities with men in all spheres of public, private, and family life, regardless of their marital status. Women obtained the right to vote and run for office in 1963. Tribal customs favor primogeniture, which passes on inheritance to the oldest male child.

Although it is legal for women to inherit property and receive equal pay for equal work, the de facto implementations of these laws are less common.

Women in Professions

Traditional gender roles still rule in matters relating to employment and yet, many women pursue their masters and doctoral degrees and are represented in the engineering, geological, and judicial fields. Rural women work mostly in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, while ethnic women create items of rich folk art such as intricately engraved wooden bells or finely woven baskets that can hold liquids.

Very few female executives are found at the top decision-making levels in the private sector. There are few, if any, Equatorial Guinean female leaders. The outlook for the growth of women in the business sector is bleak, with the

legacy of illiteracy and poverty the major obstacle to this growth. However, the country has been revealed to contain large deposits of oil, which has the potential to alleviate the suffering of its citizens and provide women with greater opportunities.

Women are not legally barred from any professions. They wear both Western and traditional African clothes with equal freedom.

Childcare facilities are few and far between. Working mothers usually get help from extended family members for childcare. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities has established a center for maternal and infant care.

Women as Business Owners

The economy of the country is based on agriculture, where women play a dominant role. Agricultural cooperatives assist women in marketing their produce, obtaining credit, and saving their income.

Women who own real estate have the same direct access to credit as men with real estate. Rural women usually earn incomes that are too low to qualify for loans. The government resolved this problem by providing them interest-free credit.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign women are met with open curiosity or suspicion, so foreign women conducting business in Equatorial Guinea may not find the going easy.

Equatorial Guinea has a poorly developed private sector. The business community closely follows Hispanic ethics and communicates mainly in Spanish. A businessperson should follow any written communication by as many personal encounters as possible. Patience and persistence are the mantras to successful business relationships.

The government has established stringent currency restrictions, and special permits are required to visit certain areas of the country. Medical care is minimal, and many medicines are unavailable.

Eritrea

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Eritrean women live in a patriarchal society that strongly believes in the inferiority of women and their subordination to men. There is one ethnic group, however, the *Kunama*, that is matrilineal. Despite obstacles created by traditional culture, the role of Eritrean women in society is slowly undergoing a change for the better. One big catalyst for this change has been the war of liberation, where Eritrean women fought shoulder to shoulder with men.

Eritrea's sole authorized political party, the PFDJ, has three women in its 19-member Executive Council and 11 women in its 75-member Central Council. Women also occupy about half of the 50 seats in the Constitutional Commission. Among the six regional administrators appointed, one is a woman. Women are also represented in the judiciary, with 410 women (20 percent of the total) elected as community court magistrates in 2003.

The role of Eritrean women in the medical field is slowly increasing; six of the 32 members in the first batch of medical students at the School of Medicine were women. Women generally occupy the lower rungs of the ladder in the medical sector as midwives, and only 8.3 percent of them are doctors.

In business, women own about 30 to 40 percent of all micro-, small-, and medium-sized businesses. They also own about 66 percent of manufacturing businesses, 40 percent of the businesses in the trade sector, and 25 percent of the businesses in the service sector.

Rural women do not have access to many basic necessities. Their living conditions are harsh and, in many cases, even primitive, with little or no education or healthcare facilities. Urban women have always been wealthier and have had access to better education than rural women.

Eritrea is a conservative society, and dress codes for women are conservative, too. Sleeveless tops and short skirts are frowned upon, although casual wear is generally accepted.

Legal Rights

Eritrean law forbids discrimination against women and provides them with the same legal rights as men. Men, however, have greater access to education, employment opportunities, and property ownership. Rural women especially experience greater discrimination in Eritrea's social arena.

Eritrean women were granted the right to vote in 1955. Eritrea's laws also permit women to own and inherit property, although these laws are not enforced in practice. Abortion is illegal in Eritrea and is only permitted when the life or the physical and mental health of the mother is at stake. Even in such cases, the abortion must be cleared by at least two registered medical practitioners, and consent has to be obtained from the woman herself, her next of kin, or a legal representative.

Recent amendments in the civil and penal codes have made it possible for Eritrean women to initiate divorce proceedings and have full rights to retain custody of their children after divorce.

Education

According to statistics, 52 percent of Eritrea's women have never received any education due to lack of access. Although the school enrollment rate for girls has increased, it still remains lower than for boys. When Eritrean girls do attend school, their classrooms are coeducational.

According to the UNDP Human Development Report, the literacy rate for Eritrean women stood at 45.6 percent as of 2003. Most Eritrean girls do not attend schools, with statistics showing that for every five rural girls, four have not attended formal school. Dropout rates are also higher among girls.

Educated women's employment opportunities are quite limited due to traditional attitudes of discrimination and their lower educational qualifications.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Eritrean laws make it necessary for the bride and the groom to mutually consent to a marriage. Dating is not practiced in Eritrean culture, and it is considered highly shameful if a girl becomes pregnant outside of wedlock.

According to Eritrean civil law, the minimum legal marriageable age for girls is 18 years. In practice, however, most Eritrean girls get married far earlier, sometimes when they are as young as 13 years old.

Polygamy is legally prohibited in Eritrea, although men hailing from areas that practice Islamic *Shari'a* law, which is exempt from Eritrea's civil laws, do engage in polygamous marriages. However, since only one wife is recognized under the law, the remaining wives are forced to marry under religious laws and are denied the legal rights that accompany registered marriages.

Eritrean women keep their father's names throughout their lives and may take their husbands' surnames in addition.

Eritrea is a male-dominated society that accords men the duty to head the household. Women are expected to stick to traditional household duties, leaving men to make the final decision in all matters.

It is very important for an Eritrean woman to have children. Childlessness is considered very bad, often being used as a reason for divorce.

According to Eritrea's laws, a divorced couple's property has to be divided equally between them. Women are also given the right to retain any property they may have had prior to the marriage. They also have the right to retain custody of the children and receive maintenance from the father for the children's welfare.

Eritrea's laws allow widowed, divorced, or mature unmarried women to own land.

Health

All Eritrean women are entitled to use the country's healthcare facilities, but the standards of such facilities are generally very poor, especially in rural areas. Statistics show that only about 28 percent of Eritrean women gave birth at a medical facility in 2003. Maternal mortality rates in 2000 were 630 deaths per 100,000 live births. Infant mortality rates in 2004 stood at 45 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Women depend upon male family members to make all healthcare decisions. Birth control is not widely practiced or encouraged due to religious reasons, but young women these days are increasingly using contraception because of the financial hardships involved in having large families. Only about 8 percent of married women use some form of birth control.

Interesting Social Customs

Traditionally, Eritrean women don't smile at their weddings, preferring to look at the ground or elsewhere.

Women in Business

General View

The participation of Eritrean women in trade and industry has been rather poor because of their generally low level of education, the lack of credit and finance, and prevailing socio-cultural attitudes. It took time for Eritrean women to start working outside home, and when they did, they had the additional task of breaking down social and cultural prejudices.

In the 1990s, The National Union of Eritrean Women started several promotional programs for women, which included compulsory education for girls, vocational training in tailoring and typing, training in traditional handicrafts, and primary health care services. Training was also given in traditionally male-oriented areas such as carpentry, plumbing, and electrical repair and services. Credit and finance facilities were also started for women to encourage them to take up small and micro enterprises.

Over 400 businesswomen are now members of the Eritrean Chamber of Commerce, holding 16 percent of total membership and 13 percent of the board of directors.

Legal Rights

Eritrean women have the right to vote and to participate in elections. Women enjoy equal rights with men in educational opportunities, pay, and property rights. However, long-standing customs and tradition prevent many women from exercising their fundamental rights. For instance, a woman can legally inherit and own property apart from her husband, but customary law overrides this, and the male relatives and sons are heavily favored in disputes over inheritance. A labor proclamation issued in 2001 provides legal protection for working women, including equal pay for equal labor. Informal labor sectors continue to discriminate against women regarding equal wages, arguing that men must carry out almost all hard, physical labor.

Women in Professions

Eritrean women have traditionally concentrated more on the domestic front, but apart from their housekeeping they also work on family farms tending livestock and poultry and create pottery and other handicrafts as well. Compulsory education and vocational training in many fields has helped many women to secure jobs as teachers, clerks, typists, health care workers, trained midwives, and many other low-paying jobs. For many this was a stepping stone, and with the help of credit and finance facilities, many women took up small and medium enterprises in the sector in which they had acquired some degree of skill and experience. Women own and run many enterprises, and currently women make up about 30 percent of the total workforce in manufacturing, trade, and services. Perhaps the most prominent Eritrean women entrepreneur is Saba Nagesh, who owns a major textile factory.

Skilled women workers can find jobs in all sectors today, and the government has ensured that they are not barred from any profession that has the state's approval. Most women professionals wear trousers and blouses with sleeves or the traditional dress of a loose skirt and a blouse, although the practice of uniform dress is the trend these days at many companies.

As a rule, the relatives, grandparents, or older siblings look after children of working women. Well-to-do working women engage maids or baby sitters from their community to look after their children. There are no state-sponsored childcare centers to look after the children of working mothers.

Women as Business Owners

Women-owned enterprises account for about 40 percent of all employment in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, employing almost two-thirds of workers in the production sector and two-fifths of those in the trade sector. Women, as a rule, own businesses in service sectors such as restaurants, hotels, coffee shops, and beauty salons. Some are involved in manufacturing traditional handicraft, jewelry, textiles, and leather products, and a few are involved in import and export, especially of textiles. Many women expand their skills into an enterprise with small but steady returns but do not invest in expanding beyond that point; this allows them to be self-employed and avoids the risk of any substantial loss, which would prove difficult to weather.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although men dominate the corporate community, visiting businesswomen are treated as their equals. Eritrean men are courteous and formal, and local businesswomen are friendly and take efforts to put their guest at ease. A professional, yet friendly and open attitude by the visiting businesswomen is appreciated. Long and friendly exchanges about families and children are typically held to help both sides to relax and establish a rapport before business discussions begin. The people of Eritrea can be quite frank about their views, bordering on abruptness; but they tackle differences in an amiable fashion. Women can wear a formal business suit or long trousers and shirts for both formal and informal meetings. Remember to remove shoes before entering a house and to pay deference to all elders.

Estonia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women generally play a subordinate role in Estonian society, even highly educated women who hold important positions. The society's patriarchal attitude has restricted the activities of women at home and work, but the status of women has seen a gradual change, especially among the younger generation. Moreover, the new Constitution ensures the rights of women and explicitly forbids gender discrimination. The efforts of women's organizations and other non-governmental organizations have also helped Estonian women to take a more active part in the development of the country.

In the past few years, Estonian women have gained access to technically and administratively demanding positions. Women's representation in politics has witnessed a marked change since independence. Now women hold 5 out of 14 government ministerial posts.

Sixty percent of law students in Estonia are women, and women constitute 61 percent of the judiciary. Women judges are actually in the majority on administrative courts (27 women and three men), and women comprise 35 percent of the membership of Estonian Bar Association.

In the business sector, 22 percent of Estonian women and 13 percent of Russian-speaking women own businesses.

Even though unemployment affects both rural and urban women, rural women have more disadvantages. The role and perception of women is similar among native Estonians and Russian-speaking Estonians.

Estonian women do not have any particular dress code restrictions. Traditionally, they wear long-sleeved shirts decorated with embroidery, and married women wear a kerchief as headwear.

Legal Rights

Article 12 of the Estonian Constitution grants full equality to men and women in all respects. Women won the right to vote in 1918. Estonian law provides women with equal rights in owning land and inheriting property.

The abortion law of Estonia permits abortions on appeal at up to 11 weeks and 6 days of gestation. The law permits women to undergo abortions at up to 21 weeks of gestation on medical grounds. The law also allows minors under the age of 16 and women over the age of 45 to have abortions, although minors must have their parents' consent.

Women can initiate divorce proceedings. They can also obtain a divorce on the basis of joint written petition. Mothers usually receive custody of children in the case of divorce. If there is more than one child, custody may be divided between the parents.

Education

Article 37 of the Estonian Constitution states that everyone has the right to education. Estonia has a wide network of coeducational public schools, and the adult literacy rate among men and women is 100 percent.

Despite their high levels of education, women do not enjoy equal opportunities in the higher levels of the job market. Seventy percent of women have occupations in the service sector.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, parents arranged their children's marriages in Estonia. The modern Estonian culture allows dating, and girls meet boys in schools, at the workplace, in social settings, or through online dating services. In fact, Internet dating "fraud" has become a growing concern in the Estonian community.

Family law dictates that a person can marry at the age of 18. A minor between 15 and 18 years of age can get married with the written consent of his or her parents or guardian. In rural areas, women get married at an average age of 25.

After marriage, spouses can select either one of the spouses' surnames as a common family name, keep their pre-marital surnames, or add the surname of the other partner to their pre-marital surname. Thus, women's family names do not reflect their marital status. A divorced woman can retain the surname taken upon marriage or resume her pre-marital surname at her will.

Polygamy is illegal and is not accepted in Estonian society.

Women have the primary responsibility for the household and do all domestic work.

Estonian law provides equal rights to spouses regarding the property acquired during a marriage. Any property owned prior to the marriage belongs to the person who owned it initially, unless they have agreed on a marital property contract.

Society does not look down on a woman who has no child. Mothers usually receive the custody of the child in case of divorce. In the case of two or more children, custody may be shared.

Health

Estonian women have easy access to good healthcare. The national research and development program adopted by the government formulates the guidelines for developing and implementing health policy on different levels.

Both urban and rural areas have equal access to gynecological and obstetrical care. Almost 99 percent of births in Estonia have professional assistance, and this has reduced the infant mortality rate. Women usually take the advice of their doctors on abortions and health care, but they have the liberty to make their own healthcare and reproductive decisions. Women have wide and easy access to birth control techniques, including abortions.

Interesting Social Customs

Estonians have a form of social interaction between young people called "bundling," in which young men visit girls at night. They practice it on Thursday and Saturday nights from St. George's Day (April 23) until Michaelmas (September 29). A marriage proposal is expected to

follow “bundling.” A man does not propose without the girl’s consent, as a refusal would cause him an insult, so he would normally take a birch branch to the doorstep or the window of the girl’s room to express his wish. If the girl takes the branch inside, it indicates her approval, and the groom can propose to her parents soon. Although society tolerates “bundling,” it does not favor it.

Women in Business

General View

When Estonia moved to a market economy in 1991, women were adversely affected, and some lingering effects, including a high level of unemployment among women (54 percent of the jobless population), have persisted. In general, young Estonian women have few opportunities for advanced education, good jobs, or high salaries. Many employers do not hire young women out of a fear that they will take maternity leave or quit their jobs.

Although there is public awareness about gender inequality in the labor market, only a mere four percent of managers are women, and high-ranking government jobs invariably go to men.

Legal Rights

The Estonian Constitution granted women voting rights in 1918. The law also makes no sex distinction in running a business or owning property. An amendment to the Wages Act guarantees equal pay for equal work and gives women the right to file a compensation claim in case of discrimination, but women still earn about 75 percent less than their male counterparts despite equal or superior qualifications.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Estonian women took care of raising children while they gave a hand in farming and cattle rearing. Today, most women work in urban areas as assistants or secretaries. Management opportunities in the private sector are usually in financial and personnel departments. Although women occupy almost every profession, they are barely present at the very top levels, except perhaps in government-run organizations.

Prominent Estonian women professionals include Ingrid Rütel, the First Lady of Estonia and patron of many projects, and Professor Ene Ergma, a member of the Academy of Sciences, Speaker of the Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament), and chairperson of the ENWISE Expert Group.

A 1992 decree prohibits women from difficult and unhealthy areas, such as sanitation and underground jobs. Estonian women do not face any dress restrictions and generally dress for work in a formal but not conservative style. Expensive clothes and jewelry should be avoided, as Estonians do not like to flaunt their economic state.

In terms of childcare for working mothers, 47 percent use public kindergartens and 53 percent opt for other means such as nannies or private childcare institutions. Queuing for seats in childcare centers is a common sight in Estonia. Public kindergartens do provide high-quality care and pre-school education to 4-to-6-year-olds, but most Estonian parents would like an alternative provision with flexible opening hours for their children nearer their

homes or workplaces. The dearth of kindergartens, compounded with expensive private childcare and absence of part-time work, prevents many women from balancing work with family life. Two NGOs, The Family Education Institute and the Võlva Union for Child Welfare, are funding playrooms in municipalities and family day-care centers.

Women as Business Owners

It is hard to say how many businesses are owned by women because there isn’t much data on this, but many women venture into self-employment and small business to avoid unemployment. Generally, women dominate areas that do not require large investment, like beauty care, hairdressing, sewing, tourism, and agriculture. Women, in general, have a tendency to start their businesses cautiously, take fewer risks than men, and avoid taking loans. The Open Estonia Foundation reveals that the community does little to support the growth of females as business or local leaders.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

As a business visitor to Estonia, it requires patience, perseverance, and, at times, a thick skin. Personal relationships are extremely important for success in business undertakings. Scheduling a meeting takes time. Remember to confirm meetings in advance by fax or letter and to avoid business visits in July and August. Estonians are very sensitive about their culture and appreciate talking about their heritage.

Ethiopia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In Ethiopia, women are considered inferior to men. Women are forced to carry heavy goods, grind corn for food, perform regular domestic chores, cook, and raise their children. The majority of Ethiopia's women are illiterate, and pervasive discrimination yields them fewer opportunities for personal growth, poorer health, and limited employment prospects.

Ethiopia's patriarchal society fosters domestic violence and child abuse, which are major problems facing Ethiopian society. Women's lives are adversely affected, both physically and psychologically, by the widespread practices of female genital mutilation and child marriages. Girls are married off when they are as young as eight years old.

Although the government has adopted certain measures to improve the status of women, nothing much has come of them. However, studies indicate that the prevalence of early marriage, marriage by abduction, and female genital mutilation has decreased.

Poverty is a way of life for the majority of Ethiopia's women. They live under harsh conditions and lack access to even the most basic amenities. Women from the upper social and economic classes lead far more privileged lives.

In politics, women hold two of the 19 seats in the Council of Ministers, 116 of the 547 seats in the House of People's Representatives, and 21 of the 113 seats in the House of Federation. In the Ethiopian judiciary, women hold four of the 14 seats in the Supreme Court, 11 in the High Court, and 14 in the first instance courts. Many women also work as nurses in the medical sector. The representation of women in Ethiopia's business sector is limited to the informal sector.

Urban women have fewer job opportunities than men and are paid much less for equal work. Rural women lead lives filled with the threat of starvation and lack access to jobs, education, and healthcare. There are clear divisions among ethnic groups in Ethiopian society, but the position of women in each of these ethnic groups does not vary much.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for Ethiopian women. Rural women usually wear traditional clothes, while Western outfits are common in urban areas.

Legal Rights

Ethiopia's Constitution grants women the same legal rights as men. Women have the right to vote and own property. Land reforms were introduced to give women equal rights with respect to the use, administration, and control of land.

Ethiopian law prohibits abortions unless the women's life or health is in grave danger. According to Ethiopian law, women cannot initiate divorce, but in case of a divorce, they have the right to claim custody of the children.

Education

Although Ethiopia's Constitution guarantees equal educational opportunities for women, a large percentage of girls do not enroll in primary school, and many girls drop out of school after completing their primary levels of education. It's not surprising, then, that the women's literacy rate is only 35 percent versus 50 percent for men. Boys and girls share the same classroom space in Ethiopia.

Educated women find it difficult to find jobs that match their qualifications. Gender-based discrimination in the job market further restricts their chances of finding a good job.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages are very common in Ethiopia. Ethiopians consider marriage to be the union of two families, and the family thus makes the choice of the spouse. Because women normally do not meet their husbands before the arranged marriage, dating is not common in Ethiopia.

The legal marriageable age for Ethiopian girls is 18, although studies indicate that their mean marrying age is 15 years. Although polygamy is legally prohibited in Ethiopia, it is widely practiced in rural areas. The first wife is usually considered the most senior, although the latest wife is usually the current "favorite."

Ethiopian women take on their husband's surname after marriage. Only the husband is recognized as the legal head of the family, while the woman plays a subordinate role. Women are expected to bear children as soon after marriage as possible, and childless women are subject to severe social stigma.

According to Ethiopian law, a spouse continues to be the sole owner of any property acquired before marriage. Property acquired during marriage is shared equally by both spouses.

Ethiopia's civil code stipulates that divorce custody and maintenance arrangements will be made only with the best interests of the child in mind. Mothers are usually given custody of children below the age of five, after which the father is the sole guardian.

Health

Women have equal access to Ethiopia's healthcare system, although drugs and proper medical facilities are lacking. Moreover, with most healthcare centers staffed by men, women seeking reproductive healthcare are placed at a serious disadvantage.

Statistics show that just 6 percent of all births in Ethiopia take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. This has resulted in a maternal mortality rate of about 860 deaths per 100,000 live births, one of the highest in the world. The infant mortality rate is 110 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Men make all health-related decisions in Ethiopia. This dominance is further reinforced by the custom of "bride's wealth," by which a man buys the reproductive rights of his wife.

Social, cultural, and religious taboos have made most women fearful of using contraceptives. Studies indicate that the rate of contraceptive use among Ethiopian women is a mere 8 percent.

Interesting Social Customs

Abusuma is a custom in which girls are forced to marry the son of their mother's brother. This is done to increase the size of the clan, maintain a peaceful marriage relationship, and retain the properties within the clan.

Women in Business

General View

The vast majority of women in Ethiopia are engaged in agriculture (87%). Besides farm work, women also run the majority of micro- and small enterprises. These small, often one-person, operations help women to contribute to the family finances and supply basic goods and services for local communities.

In urban areas, women have fewer employment opportunities, and the jobs available do not provide equal pay for equal work. Most educated women are engaged in manual and clerical jobs. A mere 11 percent hold management positions.

Legal Rights

The Ethiopian Constitution grants every citizen voting rights and assures gender equality, but unfortunately, these provisions are only on paper. Women, in general, have less access to land, education, and finance. The system is so organized that males are the sole owners of land and get inheritances almost automatically. A woman can possess land only after marriage, and, in case of a divorce, the husband retains ownership.

Women also face gender discrimination in wages despite a 1975 enactment stipulating equal pay for equal work; a survey shows that women factory workers in Addis Ababa receive about a quarter of the wages earned by men for the same work.

Women in Professions

Women have an active role in farm activities. They are responsible for preparing food, brewing beer, cutting hops, buying and selling spices, making butter, collecting and carrying wood, and fetching water. Young farm girls do household labor at an early age and usually do more work than boys.

Some prominent Ethiopian businesswomen include Aster Mengesha, Abeba Tesfaye, and Fatuma Mussa, all involved in coffee export. Mulu Solomon, Aster Abraham, Aster Mengesha, and Kebedech Erdachew are well-known exporters of handicrafts and souvenirs.

The Ethiopian population comprises more than 76 ethnic groups with varied attitudes and traditional beliefs towards women. One such belief prevents women from working on land due to the superstition that the land will not yield crops if women touch the plough. Women wear traditional clothes (*habasha kemis*) in rural areas, but Western clothes are popular in cities and towns. There are no dress restrictions in any profession.

On the domestic front, it is the primary duty of the mother to care for her children. If the mother is not available, the

responsibility falls on older female children or grandmothers. The extended family and community also assist in childcare. In urban society, where both parents work, fathers take a more active role in childcare, and families might employ babysitters. Wealthier families make use of the country's few private childcare centers.

Women as Business Owners

A 1997 survey showed that women own 65 percent of urban microenterprises and 26 percent of small-scale producers. The percentage of women owners decreases as establishment size increases, so women run only about 15 percent of large and medium enterprises.

Women pursue businesses in fields where they have gender-based skills and knowledge, such as food processing, clothing, and hairdressing. Gender bias keeps them away from the technical sector. Many are involved in agriculture and the sale of milk, yogurt, vegetables, and/or fruit from roadside stalls.

The growth of women entrepreneurship in Ethiopia is a slow but sure trend, and women are branching out into almost all business sectors. The formation of the Ethiopian Women Exporters' Forum in 2000 was an important step in helping women entrepreneurs to handle international trade and commerce through business consultation and training.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Visiting businesswomen should remember that Ethiopia is a male-dominated country and that doing business requires being respectful to men. If a woman talks too much, for instance, she can be considered a "big mouth" and people may lose respect for her. Ethiopians become less formal and more forgiving once a friendship develops, however. Personal salutations commonly used are *Ato* (Mr.), *Weizero* (Mrs.), and *Weizerit* (Miss).

Fiji

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The male-dominated culture of Fiji has always considered women subordinate to men and has deprived them of decision-making authority. Gender stereotypes limit women's access to education and healthcare, and domestic violence is common. Furthermore, the struggling economy of the country has a disproportionately negative impact on women, who work mostly in menial jobs.

That said, the status of Fijian women has undergone a gradual change since the 1990s. The efforts of several non-governmental organizations have helped women make advances in public life and the economy.

Although women's representation in politics has increased, they still hold only a few positions in the government. The 71-seat House of Representatives has only six women, and the 32-member Senate has two women. Women are marginalized in the judiciary. Only one woman has served as a High Court Judge, and four women have served at the magistrate level.

Fijian women are major contributors to the economy through their work in subsistence farming and fishing. The government has strengthened their dominance in agricultural industries, like ginger processing and floriculture, by providing women with credit to start small-scale businesses in horticulture. Fijian women also contribute to the tourism industry by producing and selling handicrafts.

Native Fijian women have more presence in public life than Indo-Fijians because of the traditional "chiefly power" favoring indigenous Fijians. Relatively, urban women have more advantages than rural women in their access to education and health.

Fijian women dress conservatively in skirts, slacks, and blouses. Some may wrap themselves in their traditional *sarong*. Indo-Fijian women wear traditional *saris* and *salwar kameez*.

Legal Rights

Fijian women have had the right to vote and run for elected office since 1963. Although the Fijian Constitution grants equal rights to women, few specific provisions protect women in private life or in industrial relations.

Fijians traditionally followed the patrilineal system of inheritance whereby men inherited all the land and property from their fathers. Nowadays, however, the law allows fathers to bequeath property (other than sacred native land) to anyone, including daughters. National law permits widows to inherit a third of their husband's estate, with the remaining two-thirds of the property shared among the other heirs of the deceased, including daughters.

Fijian law prohibits abortion except when the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, the physical and mental health of the mother is at risk, or there is early detection of a deformed fetus or congenital disease.

Under family law, women can initiate divorces, but they have to wait five years and must prove their allegations against their husbands. Although parents have equal rights over children, women generally receive the custody of children in most divorce cases.

Education

Men were favored in the education sector until the beginning of the 1990s. Since 1995, women have enjoyed equal access to education, and now they have a literacy rate of 91 percent compared to men's rate of 94 percent. According to some sources, the participation of girls in secondary school exceeds that of boys, although many poor girls drop out of school to support the economic needs of their families.

Because of inequitable labor laws, Fijian women do not have the same job opportunities as men with the same education.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Although Fijians consider marriages as a union of two families, women have the freedom to choose their own partners. Fijian culture does not approve of dating, but Western influences have made it common, especially in urban areas. Couples generally meet in schools, the workplace, social events, or through online dating.

The minimum legal age for marriage is 16 for women and 18 for men. Marriages of anyone below 21 years of age, however, require the consent of the parent or guardian.

Society views men as the heads of the household and relegates women to their principal roles of homemaking and child rearing. Fijian society looks down on childless women and those unable to produce male children.

The prevalent customary laws forbid women to hold assets separate from their husbands. The Family Law Bill of 2003, however, guarantees married women equal rights to property acquired during marriage. The law also gives women custody of their children upon divorce.

Health

Fijian women have equal access to the health care system, but most healthcare facilities are available only in district hospitals difficult for rural women to reach. Fiji has an infant mortality rate of 14 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Although the state provides free maternal and child care services and free family planning, the lack of trained staff and modern equipment has a negative impact on women's health. Generally, women do not make healthcare decisions independently.

Interesting Social Customs

The social custom of "*bulu bulu*" (apology and reconciliation) prevents many women from reporting cases of domestic abuse and violence.

Women in Business

General View

The Fijian woman's traditional role of homemaker, mother, and wife has seen a remarkable change over the years. Rural women still contribute to their families by taking jobs in small-scale agriculture, fishery, food production, and produce-marketing operations, but nowadays women are also active participants in other areas of the formal and informal economies and in professional careers as doctors, professors, pilots, and entrepreneurs.

Legal Rights

Fijian laws give equal voting rights to women. Although the Constitution grants women the right to inherit real property, inheritance among native Fijians and Indo-Fijians is largely patrilineal. National law decrees that a surviving widow is entitled to at least a third of her ex-husband's property, with the remaining two-thirds apportioned among the deceased's heirs, including daughters. Today Fijians can will property, other than traditionally sacred land, to anyone. The right to property ownership and inheritance has made it possible for a number of women to finance entrepreneurial ventures.

The industrial relations legislation of Fiji does not protect women. Fijian industries generally pay women less than their male counterparts, especially in the garment industry, where women are subject to a special minimum wage requirement. On average, women earn an equivalent of 88 percent of male wages.

Women in Professions

Women constitute more than 50 percent of teachers in Fiji, but only 23 percent of primary school head teachers and 14 percent of secondary school principals.

Rural women contribute to the family economy by running microbusiness enterprises, commonly in fishing and agriculture. Fiji prohibits women from working in mines.

Nowadays there are many female entrepreneurs, chief executives, and high-ranking government officials. Feluani Pa'u of Samatau, for instance, is a successful business owner in Fiji, with six businesses under her control involved in fishing, swine rearing, agriculture, car repair, transportation, and catering. Other prominent women business owners in Fiji include Viole Sasa (groceries), Ialeni Fanueli (clothing and frozen food), Tae Anasapi (farming, *elei* printing, and handicrafts), Oloni Pusa (plantation and local retail), Mere Gaunavou (photography), and Drome (managing director of Fine Metals).

In Fiji, parents, particularly mothers, take care of the child. Working women seek the help of their immediate and extended family members for childcare. State-sponsored childcare facilities exist, as well as childcare centers run by other private and non-governmental voluntary organizations.

Women as Business Owners

Women run 19 percent of small and micro- enterprises. Of these, 44 percent are operated by Indo-Fijian women, 34 percent by Fijian women, and 22 percent by women of other ethnic origins.

Women in rural regions of the Fiji Islands constitute the major subsistence producers (mainly fishing) and small-scale marketers of food and handicrafts. Women make up the majority of paid workers in fruit harvesting, ginger processing, and export floriculture as well. Despite abundant opportunities in the tourist markets for souvenirs and handicrafts, women play a minor role in these businesses.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Fijian government policies promote a friendly business environment, and all foreign businesspeople are treated very well.

A visitor should be aware that there are cultural differences between the native Fijians and the Fijians of Indian origin. Fiji's Indians dominate the business field. Fijians are generally very polite and hospitable, but they do not communicate explicitly and it can take time for a visitor to understand them. Comprehensive discussions and a good working rapport with Fijian counterparts help alleviate these communication problems.

Women dress conservatively, and they expect visiting businesswomen to dress in a similar way. Female visitors should dress modestly in knee-length skirts. Avoid standing with your hands on your hips (an expression of anger or arrogance), touching an indigenous Fijian's head (a traditional taboo), and pointing at a person while conversing (considered rude). Remove your shoes when entering a Fijian home. Folding your hands behind your back is a sign of respect while conversing.

The high rate of corruption poses a threat to visitors. Avoid taking the help of policemen and, if need arises, be cautious when reporting a crime to the police.

Finland

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Finnish women hold a strong and valued position in their society. Their gender equality is among the highest in the world, and both women's organizations and the government continue to play a prominent role in pushing Finnish society toward complete equality.

Finns have always encouraged women's participation in politics and public life. Finnish women were the first in Europe to obtain the right to vote and the right to stand in Parliamentary elections. Finns elected Tarja Halonen as their first female president in 2000.

Finnish women also have high representation in the medical field, constituting 60 percent of physicians. About 40 percent of women have doctoral degrees, and 18 percent work in academia as professors.

Urban women have better opportunities and access to quality employment than rural women, many of whom take up low-paid or part-time jobs to better balance work with their family responsibilities.

The role of women in the Sami (formerly known as Lapp), Estonian, Swedish, and Russian minorities is similar to that of the population at large, where they enjoy the same rights as men.

Finnish women dress in typical European clothing with an emphasis on warm wool garments suited to their climate.

Legal Rights

The Finnish Constitution grants women equal rights under family and property law and in the judiciary. Since the government places a high priority on gender equality, it maintains three primary government organizations for gender equality issues: the Ombudsman for Equality, the Gender Equality Unit, and the Council for Equality.

Under an 1879 law, women inherit equally with men. Property law also has provisions for married women to independently manage their own income.

According to the abortion law of 1970, women have the right to have abortions for many health and social reasons up until the 12th week of pregnancy with the approval of two doctors. After 12 weeks, the legal requirement for an abortion includes risk to the woman's physical health or life or complications with the fetus.

Women have an equal right to initiate divorces after a consideration period of six months from filing the application. Upon divorce, both the parents have equal rights to custody of children.

Education

Finland offers free and mandatory primary education for children between the ages of seven and 16. The proportion of women who have completed secondary education is higher than that of men. Finland has the highest literacy rate in the world, at 100 percent.

Finnish women obtained permission to pursue professional education in 1863, and teaching quickly became the foremost profession of women.

Finns disregard the concept of a "non-working" woman, and women generally have the same job opportunities as men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Finnish women choose their own life partners. Boys and girls start dating from an early age. Women meet men in educational, social, leisure, and online settings.

Finnish women marry at an average age of 29, compared to men's average marriage age of 31. These days, many Finnish couples choose to live together without getting legally married.

Finns believe that a man heads the family and a woman is the heart of it, meaning that both make an equal contribution to the well being of the family. Finnish women are allowed to hold assets separate from their husbands. They have the right to keep their surname or to take their husband's surname. If they divorce, they can either retain the surname or revert to their maiden name.

Both parents are entitled to paid maternity or paternity leave without the risk of losing his or her job. Childlessness carries no stigma in Finland.

In case of divorce, both the parents have equal rights to custody of children. The court has the authority to assign the custody of a child to another person in addition to or instead of the parents with their consent.

Health

Finland has an excellent healthcare system with the world's highest doctor-patient and nurse-patient ratios. Women have equal access to all healthcare facilities regardless of their socio-economic position.

Finland's comprehensive municipal healthcare system designates independent decision-making authority to each municipality. This has resulted in good maternal and childcare practices. Pregnant women and newborn babies receive excellent care in Maternity Health Care Clinics and Well-Baby Clinics. The easy access to health care and vaccination has contributed to Finland's low infant mortality rate of 3.76 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Generally women make their own health decisions. The easy availability of contraceptive measures and awareness of family planning options is responsible for the small number of abortions in the country.

Interesting Social Customs

In Finnish weddings, the bride symbolically carries a match with her to keep the love burning in her marriage. According to an old superstition, wearing clothes with knots before the wedding ceremony brings bad luck.

Women in Business

General View

Finland has always had women working on a par with men in the fields and factories, and Finnish women remain active throughout their country's diversified economy. Equality among men and women exists both in law and in practice, reinforced by the country's strong economic position and its considerable investments in education and training. Many women hold high positions in the professions and government (where the president and eight of 17 ministers are women), although they are still somewhat underrepresented in business.

Legal Rights

In 1906 Finland was the first European country to give its women the right to vote and to run for elected office. Laws relating to property and family treat men and women equally. They have the right to inherit property and are equal owners of all marital property.

Discrimination against women is evident in salary structures, where women earn about twenty percent less than men. Women hold only 10 percent of the executive-level jobs in private business and 27 percent of public-sector management positions.

Women in Professions

Over 40 percent of Finnish women find employment in the public sector, many as educators, doctors, nurses, and social workers. Other areas of significant involvement are fashion design, culture, and the law.

There are few women in top managerial posts in Finland: Tarja Halonen is Finland's first woman president and a former foreign minister; Karita Alen is the managing director of Camelina Ltd.; and Sari Baldauf, named Europe's most influential business woman by *Financial Times* in 2004, is general manager of Nokia Networks.

Finnish women are not prohibited from any professions. In fact, the state-supported Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church even accepts women for the priesthood. Women are also not bound by any dress codes. Formal business attire is considered suitable outside, while T-shirts and casual pants are normally worn at home.

Infants are usually taken care of by both parents, since mothers and fathers are both eligible for a parental leave of six to thirty days after a child's birth. Parents are also eligible for full or partial childcare leave until a child turns three. During this leave, the jobs of the parents are secure and they are given a home care allowance. After three years, parents can place their children in the state-run municipal day care or private day care and receive an allowance to cover part of the private day-care expenses.

Women as Business Owners

About one third of all business owners and self-employed people in Finland are women. Business owners are active in the textile, rubber, clothing, and leather industries.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are treated in a very friendly manner in both business and personal settings. The Finns, however, are formal in business and do not usually insist on the need to establish personal relationships

outside of work. They are direct and open, and give a lot of importance to time management. They do not expect direct contact, and most correspondence can be done via e-mail.

Shake hands with everyone present, irrespective of their age and gender, both at the beginning and at the end of a meeting, whether it's business or social. Maintain eye contact when speaking. Do not make a public display of emotions. Do not question people on their personal lives, religious beliefs, jobs, or politics. Small talk may go on for an hour or two after dinner. Do not leave a dinner until after the coffee, dessert, and/or cognac is served.

France

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Historically, women had few legal rights and were rarely educated in France. Today, French women play a prominent role in the family and in society, and are usually treated as well as their male counterparts. Relatively minor variation in treatment depends on social and economic class. French women enjoy equality with men in status, education, employment, and in many other spheres. French society does encounter lingering patriarchal elements, but women have full freedom of choice.

Women's participation in the employment sector proves greatest in retail, government service, academia, medicine, and service arenas. Participation in politics has remained low, despite a constitutional ruling calling for every political party's election list to include 50 percent females. Women currently hold only about 12 percent of the seats in the Lower House of Parliament. Few women occupy managerial or executive positions in business. This is changing, however, as more women become business owners, taking up jobs in technology and other sectors. On the positive side, almost half of all doctors in France are female. Nevertheless, there remains a considerable wage gap between men and women.

Women in rural areas, in some communities, and in certain regions still limit themselves to traditional women's tasks, both in and outside the house. Though rural women often enjoy less status, their economic activity rate has matched that of urban women since 1997. Many of France's African subcultures place more social restrictions on women. These women are more likely to be discriminated against when applying for work outside of their own communities.

In terms of dress, French women have been stereotyped as some of the best-dressed in the world, and in fact, no restrictions on women's dress exist in France.

Legal Rights

French women won the right to vote in 1944 and have equal access to elected posts. Laws protect them against discrimination, violence (including marital violence and spousal rape), trafficking for sexual exploitation, and practices like female genital mutilation. Women enjoy equality in family law and property law, ensured by the Ministry of Parity and Equality. They have the right to drive, can own, manage, and inherit property independently, and can make their own reproductive decisions.

Women can initiate divorce, which is granted on three grounds: mutual consent (by joint request or initiated by one spouse and accepted by the other); irretrievable breakdown of the marriage; or fault. Both partners have equal rights towards joint property after divorce in most cases. In divorce cases involving children, courts require both parents to contribute towards the children's maintenance. Courts usually award joint custody, and in cases where they do not, the non-custodial parent receives visitation rights, provided no extenuating circumstances interfere.

Education

Education remains free and compulsory for all French children, male or female, between the ages of 6 and 16. Schools and colleges are coeducational. The literacy rate for both females and males stands at 99 percent. French women with equal access to education, in many cases, prove better qualified than their male colleagues. More women than men complete the undergraduate level of education, and numerous women and men virtually demonstrate equality at post-graduate and Ph.D. levels.

Women still face discrimination while applying for jobs, especially when seeking high-level positions, regardless of their equal or even higher educational qualifications, according to some sources. In terms of pay, women consistently earn less and experience a higher rate of unemployment than men. As far as presence in the workforce, 57 percent of the French work force is female, but fewer than 20 percent of private-sector executives are women. Many women take to part-time and contractual employment due to a greater burden of balancing work and family life. Women hold about 80 percent of France's lowest-paying jobs.

Dating, Marriage and Family

French women choose their own mates; however, marriage rates continue to decline in France as more people choose socially and legally accepted live-in relationships. Forced marriages remain a problem in some ethnic communities, but French law stipulates that parents be prosecuted if they force a child to marry.

Young women may date, and sometimes begin dating as young as 12 or 13. They may meet their future spouses in a wide variety of ways, but most French women marry men from the same region as themselves. Average age for marriage is 27, though regional and class differences play a role in marriage age.

Women generally assume their husband's name after marriage, though no requirement necessitates this. A recent French law allows children to be given both their mother's and their father's surnames. In cases of divorce, a woman usually reverts to her maiden name, though she can keep her married name through mutual agreement or by obtaining a judge's authorization.

Married women generally have equal say in household matters, though this varies according to their social and economic status, by region, and even according to ethnicity. Married women also have the right to own and manage property independently within a marriage. The French generally attach no stigma to not having children or to having few children. In France, the birth rate has reached 1.9 children per woman, the highest in the European Union.

France banned polygamy in 1993, but some African communities still practice it. French authorities work to discourage the practice, but most polygamous marriages take place overseas or predate the 1993 law.

Health

Women have equal rights to medical care in France and have a long life expectancy. Standards of medical care prove excellent, and the infant mortality rate remains low, at approximately 4 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Women can make their own reproductive and health care decisions. Over 60 percent of women 20 to 44 years of age use contraceptives in France. Use of modern contraceptives including pills, IUDs, and "afterthought contraception" remains high. France was the first western country to introduce the RU 486, an abortion pill.

Interesting Social Customs

French culture does not frown on nudity. Many women go topless at beaches, especially in St Tropez.

Women in Business

General View

French women are approaching equality to men in terms of education, employment, and status in society. They actively participate in the workplace in all industries and at all levels. In fact, in 2000 the rate of employment for women was an impressive 80 percent for all women between the ages of 25 and 49 and 87 percent among single women. Marriage and motherhood are not deterrents for French working women, since the government is very supportive of increasing family sizes, decreasing the number of hours worked per week, and ensuring employment for women.

On the other hand, some degree of institutionalized gender bias remains in France. French working women find themselves disproportionately represented in lower wage service sector jobs and, while they are generally better qualified than their male colleagues, they have a tougher time getting jobs and reaching the managerial level. Many women also opt for temporary, part-time, and contractual jobs, widening the significant gap in the earnings of women versus men.

Legal Rights

Women were granted the right to vote in 1944, despite the fact that political parties are required to have at least 50 percent female members on their election party lists, female representation in politics is low, with just 12 percent of the total seats in the lower house.

Women have the right to own and manage property independently, even when married. Assets purchased after marriage are considered jointly owned by both partners irrespective of who paid for it under the *communauté de biens réduite aux acquêts* law, but this can be changed in a pre-nuptial agreement. Inheritance rights are also favorable for women. Women have always had the right to drive and they buy one of every three cars sold in France.

On average, women earn about 25 percent less than men, primarily because of employment in low-wage sectors.

Women in Professions

Over 60 percent of working women are employed in civil and local government, shops, service businesses, academics, and supplementary medical services. The

service sector employs more women than men, as does the government sector. The technology sector has one of the lowest ratios of female employees.

A 2006 survey revealed that 75 percent of the top companies in France have women on their boards of directors, with women representing a total of 7.6 percent of the total board members. There are just two companies that have four or more female directors and two that have three female directors. Two such companies are headed by a woman at the CEO/chairperson level.

Prominent female French business leaders include AnneLauvergeon, CEO of AREVA Group, a Global 500 company; Bernadette Andrietti, general manager of Intel France; Karen Guerra, vice president and general manager of France Colgate Palmolive; Christine Lagarde, French Deputy Minister for Foreign Trade; and Louise Makin, CEO of BTG plc.

Rural women are becoming as economically active as their urban counterparts. Their activity rate, at 78 percent, equaled urban women's activity rate for the first time in 1997, with most of them employed in the service sector.

The laws that barred women from certain jobs and night shifts have been repealed recently. There are no dress code restrictions for French women.

French working mothers have various options regarding childcare. Crèches and day nurseries are available for children aged two-and-a-half months to three years. Children aged two to six years can go to nurseries run by the Ministry of Education. Government also provides direct financial aid to encourage childcare at home.

Women as Business Owners

In 1998, about 30 percent of French companies were owned and managed by women. Most were small-scale operations, with just seven percent of them having more than ten employees. Businesses are typically service-related or related to feminine products like cosmetics or fashion. Many women actively take part in running family businesses, although they do not usually have any formal managerial titles.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The work culture in France is fairly formal, although harmless flirting by male colleagues is tolerated and sometimes even initiated by female colleagues. Business meetings may be slow and involve more discussion than decision-making. Discussions may be intense, but do not use a hard sell, aggressive approach. Be aware of the importance of formal written communication, as well as the advantages of having business cards in French and knowing a few French phrases.

Business attire for women is typically formal and stylish. Suits are expected for major meetings, but tasteful blouses, skirts, slacks, and dresses in subdued tones are generally the order of the day.

French Guiana

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women in French Guiana have similar legal rights to women in France, but French Guiana's more fragile economy, coupled with the cultures of its deeply multi-ethnic society, gives women a far less secure situation than their Continental sisters. Most ethnic societies in French Guiana are patriarchal in nature, although there are matrilineal traditions among the *Maroons*. In a traditional patriarchal society, women are still held responsible for homekeeping, child rearing, and subsistence gardening, while men are the breadwinners and decision-makers.

French Guiana is governed by France's social security system, which offers subsidies and equal opportunities to all men and women. Participation in business, politics, and the professions is open to all citizens. However, there are few female executives, administrators, or decision-makers in the public or private sectors.

In general, the position of French Guiana women in the society has been improving, with women participating more fully in the economy, politics, and society and attaining more independence.

Women's role and position in society usually vary according to the ethnic group or sub-culture to which they belong. French Guiana's population is composed of people of black or mixed ancestry (66 percent); European descent (12 percent); East Indian, Chinese, Amerindian, or Brazilian background (12 percent); and other ethnic groups like Creoles, Arawaks, Caribs, Maroons, and Javouhey (10 percent). The outlook of urban and rural women is similar, with both groups receiving substantial social and economic benefits from the government.

There are no dress code restrictions for French Guianan women. Lao style sarongs and Western/French style clothing are prevalent.

Legal Rights

French Guiana is an overseas department of France, governed by the French legal system and the French Constitution. All men and women have equal legal rights in all respects. Women have the right to vote and the right to inherit or possess property. However, French Guiana women face regional discrimination and social pressures that prevent them from exercising their rights.

An abortion is allowed within ten weeks of pregnancy, as long as it's performed by a doctor in an approved hospital. After ten weeks, abortion is allowed with the approval of two doctors, either to save the life of the expectant mother or if the newborn is in danger of suffering physical or mental disability.

Women have the right to initiate divorce on many grounds, including mutual consent, non-performance of marital duties, or the mental impairment of the spouse. Custody of children can be mutually decided by the parents or by the court. The court considers the wishes of a minor who understands the situation.

Education

French Guiana provides compulsory education to all children until they are 16 years of age. The education pattern in all schools is similar to that in France. French Guiana has single-sex as well as coeducational academic institutions.

On an average, the female literacy rate is around 88 percent, compared to 90 percent for men. Most girls in French Guiana complete their primary education; however, women's participation in higher education is negligible, because most of them migrate to France for their higher education.

Irrespective of their educational status, women and men primarily work in agricultural activities, timberwork and fisheries for a livelihood. Moreover, the number of jobs in French Guiana's government and services sector is very low, and the participation of women is meager. When they do find formal wage employment, their job status is usually lower than that of men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Women in French Guiana usually choose their own partners. In the rural areas, however, the tradition of arranged marriages and *nqi tshoob* (bride wealth) is still the norm.

Dating is practiced, especially in urban areas, and most young people start dating when they reach their teens. Common meeting places for boys and girls include educational institutions and dating websites.

Most women marry during their early twenties, though some parents marry off girls as young as 12 years old. Married women are generally restricted from communicating with males who are neither relatives nor the husband's acquaintances. Also, a wife does not attend social gatherings or travel alone without her husband.

Polygamy is illegal in French Guiana, but is still practiced in some ethnic groups.

French Guiana women typically take their husband's name after marriage. In rare cases, both spouses may join each other's surnames and adopt it for common usage. In a divorce, a woman has the right to retain or remove the husband's name.

Women are traditionally in charge of the household and childcare while men work to earn an income for the family. Women can hold assets separate from their husbands and also inherit her husband's property after his death.

In case of a divorce, the judiciary usually grants custody of the children to both parents and requires one parent to pay child maintenance to the parent with whom the children resides.

Health

Urban women of French Guiana have complete and equal access to public health services, but the same cannot be said for rural women. Special maternity and childcare centers exist for the assistance of pregnant women and infants.

The 2006 estimate of the infant mortality rate in French Guiana is 12 deaths per 1,000 live births.

French Guianan women are free to make their own birth control decisions and have easy access to abortion pills and birth control measures such as contraceptives.

Interesting Social Customs

Six weeks after his child's birth, a French Guianan husband's skin is cut open. Family members then rub ground pepper plant all over his body so he shares the experience of pain that his wife undergoes at the time of childbirth.

Women in Business

General View

Traditionally, French Guianan women were responsible for domestic tasks, child rearing, and gardening, while men worked to support the household. These days, only 29 percent of women are economically active, although this is due in part to the extremely high rates of unemployment throughout the country. Women typically earn a living from trading and processing the country's natural resources: timber, fish, shrimp, and gold. The role of women in these businesses is gradually expanding.

As the country is governed by the French legal system, the economic, social, and political development of French Guianan women is large dependent on France. Guaranteed minimum wages, subsidies, social welfare, and small changes in women's societal status (like the appointment of a few tribal women as village leaders) have helped. Nonetheless, women are barely represented among the employees of the European space agency, located in Kourou, which employs about 25 percent of the country's labor force (directly and indirectly) and contributes almost 50 percent of the country's gross domestic product.

Legal Rights

According to the French Constitution, men and women equally have the right to vote and run for elected office and to own and inherit property and businesses. Although prohibited by law, wage discrimination is widespread, with women in French Guiana earning less than the men for performing similar jobs. In rural and minority societies, women are involved in local administrative and political affairs, although men usually hold the decision-making positions.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, French Guianan women are engaged in subsistence agriculture, forestry, and fishing and shrimp processing. A nominal percentage of women are engaged in gold mining, coastal work, and trading for a livelihood.

Apart from these economic activities, women's participation, especially as managers and skilled workers, is rare. Somewhere between 20 and 35 percent of the total population in French Guiana is unemployed, with the rate higher for women than men. The growth rate for women in business is bleak, with the current economic environment very unfavorable for starting up businesses.

There are no state-run childcare centers for the benefit of working parents, so working mothers entrust childcare to

other members of the immediate or extended family, such as grandparents or older siblings.

Women as Business Owners

Not many women in French Guiana own their own businesses. Women are usually engaged in manual labor, buying and selling, and the civil service, but not as business owners or executives. Businesses owned by women are usually micro- or small-sized ones that deal with agricultural and other basic home products.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Very few foreign people visit the country for business purposes, but the business culture is a cross between European norms and the more relaxed South American practices. In terms of business etiquette, English is the most commonly used language, although knowing French is certainly a plus. The best time to visit the country is from August to November, when the climate is moderate and dry.

Modest casual dress is accepted in French Guiana for formal as well as informal meetings. Western styles of attire, such as short sleeves and light colors, are very common.

Gabon

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Gabonese women enjoy a more comfortable place in society than women in many parts of Africa. Although Gabonese culture is, in the main, male-oriented, women are usually active participants in family life and have ventured beyond traditional roles to a degree. Gabonese women and girls are treated reasonably well, though discrimination does persist in many areas. Though upper-class women have better access to quality education and health services, social distinctions are not important in most situations.

The role and outlook of women in Gabon is slowly changing. The Gabonese Constitution has eliminated most legal forms of discrimination against women and now promotes gender equality, so more women are achieving outside the home and working towards more influential positions.

Women remain underrepresented in politics. At the end of 2005, only 11 of the 120 National Assembly members and 12 of 91 senators were women. Women held five of the 43 ministerial positions. More than half of Gabonese medical graduates are women. Women also outnumber men in the judiciary, especially among magistrates and clerks, with the president of the Constitutional Court being a woman. About 10 percent of Gabonese women manage companies.

More than half of Gabon's citizens live in urban areas. Rural women more often live in poverty, and their activities are usually confined to agriculture and small businesses. Access to education and healthcare is also limited for rural women. Non-Gabonese women living in Gabon can legally access only inferior healthcare and education services.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for Gabonese women. Rural women tend to wear traditional clothes, with urban Gabonese women choosing a more Westernized style of dressing.

Legal Rights

Gabon's Constitution provides equal legal rights to women in all areas of society. Gabon granted women the right to vote in 1956. Women have the right to drive and can own and inherit property. Gabonese women can and do own property, run businesses, and work in both public and private sector jobs.

These laws are not always enforced, and some discrimination persists, particularly in domestic affairs. For example, a man's family must give written authorization before his widow can inherit property. In rural areas, people often follow traditional inheritance practices. These vary amongst ethnic groups, but are sometimes strongly patrilineal.

Abortion is illegal, although therapeutic abortions are permitted if the woman's life is in danger.

Women have the right to initiate divorces, although this rarely happens. Gabonese women usually have children

before marriage. These children stay with their mother, while children born after marriage go to their father in the event of a divorce.

Education

Under the Gabonese Constitution, women are granted equal access to education, and school is compulsory for children aged six to 16. Scholarships are offered to students on a non-discriminatory basis, with girls as eligible to receive them as boys.

The literacy rate for Gabonese women was 62.2 percent in the year 2000. Men's adult literacy rate for the same year was 79.8 percent. Literacy rates among rural women are even lower, and some estimates show that almost half of rural women aged 15 and above cannot read.

Although it is mandatory for children of both sexes to attend school until the age of 16, this does not always happen. Financial problems sometimes keep girls from attending school, and many girls become pregnant and drop out of school. Almost all girls attend primary school, but only about 40 percent go on to junior high school. A mere 7.2 percent make it to high school, and about 2.6 percent finish higher education. The few girls that do continue their education tend to get higher marks than their male counterparts. Women play a leading role in universities, especially in advanced studies.

Although women have the same access to education and vocational training, Gabonese women face discrimination when looking for a job or seeking promotion to high-level positions. Many work in the cities as secretaries or in service level jobs. Over a third of working women are employed in the civil service. Women also dominate in healthcare and education. Many are assigned non-critical work, and chances for advancement are few. Pay packages for Gabonese women and men in similar jobs are usually comparable, but because fewer women hold high-level positions, they earn less overall.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, the Gabonese have arranged marriages. Although dowry practices and arranged marriages still exist, the majority of Gabonese women are free to choose their own spouses without input from their families. The government has introduced laws to make forcing girls into marriage a punishable offence.

Dating begins quite early, with many women getting married by the time they are 15 years old, which is the legal minimum age for girls to marry. Gabonese women meet men at social events, in the workplace, and at school or college. Only civil marriages are legally recognized, but most Gabonese have common law marriages, which do not protect women's property rights.

Polygamy is not only legal, but it is more widely practiced than monogamy. When couples marry legally, they indicate whether they intend to have a monogamous or polygamous relationship. In many cases, married people, monogamous or polygamous, will live in the husband's family home with other extended family members.

Although polygamous marriages are still more common, the number of monogamous marriages is increasing.

Women can hold assets separately from their husbands, although in a joint marital estate, the husband is the administrator of all the couple's assets. Married Gabonese women may retain their parental name, take on their husband's names, or combine both.

Men usually act as head of the household, per the Civil Code, and make most family decisions. Specific discriminatory laws, like one requiring women to get their husband's permission for international travel, exist but are not always enforced. Still, Gabonese women are taught to be outspoken, and usually have a strong say in family matters. Many women assume sole charge of the household when their husbands migrate to cities for work.

It is bad if a Gabonese woman is childless. Although some Gabonese marry for love, many men choose wives who they think will bear them a lot of children, and it is usual for women to have children before they marry. The average Gabonese woman gives birth to 4.76 children.

When a monogamous couple divorces, each spouse receives an equal share of the marital assets. A woman divorcing from a polygamous marriage is entitled only to a one-time payment of half of the support she received during marriage. Courts usually make the final decision regarding custody of children, although customary law dictates that any children born after marriage belong to the father, while those born before marriage belong to the mother.

Health

Gabonese women are entitled to equal healthcare. Rural women, however, have limited access to healthcare facilities, and many turn to traditional medicine men for treatment.

Recent estimates indicate that a skilled medical attendant supervises 86 percent of births. The maternal mortality rate is about 420 per 100,000, and infant mortality is about 54.5 deaths per 1,000. The law gives women the right to make their own healthcare decisions, but many women must still defer to their husbands.

The Gabonese government is increasing the availability of contraceptives and promoting awareness of modern birth control methods. About one third of married women of childbearing age use some form of contraception.

Interesting Social Customs

Within the family home, men and women have their own gathering places. Outside of the main house, each woman normally has her own kitchen hut, where she sleeps with her children. The men of the house usually have a specially made, semi-open gathering area, with waist-high walls and a roof, where they can meet and socialize.

Women in Business

General View

The traditional roles of Gabonese women as wives, mothers, and workers on the family farm have been gradually expanding, and women are now much more active in the economy. They have better employment opportunities and have even made their presence felt in

traditionally male-dominated sectors like the army and the corporate sector. Many women are also involved in starting and running their own businesses.

Quite a few high-level positions in the government, judiciary, army, and the private sector are now occupied by women. Gabonese women are also offered the same access as men to health care, education, literacy, and other training programs.

While Gabon is still a society dominated by men, it is somewhat less so than other traditionally male-dominated societies in Africa. Discrimination remains present, but women are more aware of their rights and are asserting them.

Legal Rights

Gabon's Constitution provides women with all the legal rights that men enjoy, and discrimination in any form is prohibited. This means that women have equal access to opportunities in Gabon's economic, educational, political, and social arenas. Gabonese law permits women to own and operate businesses, and Gabonese women were granted the right to vote in 1956.

Gabon's laws stipulate that wage levels have to be calculated on the basis of factors like qualification and performance and must be equal for all workers in the public and private sectors. Gabonese officials insist that these policies have resulted in true wage equality for Gabonese women.

Women in Professions

Educated Gabonese women are primarily employed in teaching, the civil service, and in support or administrative positions in the cities (clerks, cashiers, librarians, secretaries, stenographers, and administrative personnel). Women also have a strong presence in medical and health care fields and outnumber men in the lower levels of the judiciary.

Less than five percent of the CEOs and less than one percent of those who sit on the board of directors of companies in Gabon are women. However, more Gabonese women are joining the business sector, thanks to better education and a desire for independence.

The number of female heads of companies in Gabon is very low, at ten percent. Victoire Lasseni Duboz is the current chairwoman on the board of the Gabonese National Timber Company and a former parliamentarian. Marie-Julie Nse Ndzime heads a printing company called Dynasty, which began operations in 1990. Georgette Linda Toussaint owns a company that holds the sole franchise for the sale of cars manufactured in South Korea.

The Gabonese Constitution forbids any discrimination against women in access to employment opportunities, and women are not barred from any professions except those that require night work and that might be unduly strenuous to their health. In practice, however, some employers prefer men over women for certain jobs that require physical strength and a constant attendance. The second factor works to the disadvantage of women, who are allowed to take maternity leave.

Generally, Gabonese women dress conservatively, though the Western style is common, especially in the urban areas. There are no dress restrictions that prevent Gabonese women from working in particular jobs.

Working mothers rely on relatives such as the grandparents and even neighboring mothers to take care of their children. Older children may also take care of their younger siblings. Gabon offers its women the option of leaving their children in public and private day care or nurseries specifically designed for working women.

Women as Business Owners

There are not many Gabonese women who own businesses, but their number is increasing. Rural women typically run small businesses or micro-enterprises based on agricultural products. Urban women, who have better access to credit facilities than their rural counterparts, start businesses that cover a wider range of products and services. Gabonese businesswomen still face obstacles in obtaining large loans.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Gabon attracts quite a few foreigners because of its oil-rich economy. Foreign businesswomen are generally treated with a lot of respect by Gabonese business people. The Gabonese tend to view all foreigners as being extremely privileged, so they show foreigners enormous respect that sometimes borders on excess.

Gabonese lack the concept of personal space, being a very public-oriented, communal people, and they can be disconcertingly direct. When the Gabonese are curious about something they tend to stare, and if they want something they may just walk up to you and ask for it.

The Gabonese assess the wealth of a person by a number of factors that include the number of chickens and cattle they possess, the number of pots in the kitchen, and the size of their wardrobe.

Gambia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditional cultural and religious practices give Gambian women a position inferior to men. Women are valued only for their childbearing and child-rearing skills and are not allowed to make independent decisions. This has led to widespread discrimination against women in many areas, including education and employment.

Gambia has a strongly patriarchal society where the husband is the head of the family and women play a supporting role. Gambian society prefers sons over daughters. Although few cases of domestic violence and abuse are reported, their incidence is believed to be fairly common. The practice of female genital mutilation is widespread.

Upper-class women in Gambia generally lead affluent lives with greater access to public and private services. The lives of lower-class women, on the other hand, are a constant struggle to make ends meet. Rural women lack access to education, as indicated by the staggeringly low rural female literacy rate of 18 percent. Their access to other services such as healthcare and employment is also very limited.

Several measures have been taken by the Gambian government to improve the condition of women. These measures include enforcing gender-equality laws and combating the practice of female genital mutilation. There are also several non-governmental organizations actively involved in the fight for women's rights.

In politics, six of the 48 seats in Gambia's Parliament and three of 15 ministerial seats are occupied by women, including the post of Vice President. A few Gambian women work for the judiciary, mostly as judicial secretaries. A number of women work as nurses in the medical sector. The representation of women in Gambia's business sector is very low and is mostly restricted to the informal sector.

There are many ethnic groups in Gambia such as the *Mandinka*, *Fula*, *Wolof*, *Jola*, and *Serahule*. The status of women in all these groups is similar. The position of

Gambian women depends more on their religious affiliation than their ethnic group. Muslim women generally have less freedom than Christian women.

Living in a country with a Muslim majority, women in Gambia dress modestly. However, Western styles of dress are prevalent in the urban areas.

Legal Rights

Gambian law guarantees every person equal rights before the law, regardless of gender. Gambian women won the right to vote in 1960.

Matters concerning inheritance and property are governed by Islamic *Shari' a* law. Women receive only a small share of the inheritance, the rest going to the male relatives.

Abortions in Gambia are legal only when performed to save the life of the mother. A woman has the right to initiate divorce, although under Islamic law, she may do so only after obtaining her husband's consent. In a divorce, a Gambian woman has the right to claim custody of the children.

Education

The Gambian Constitution guarantees women equal access to education. The government has adopted a program called the Girl's Education Initiative to provide equal educational opportunities and access for girls. Gambia's schools are co-educational, with boys and girls sharing the same classrooms.

About 70 percent of the girls in Gambia enroll in primary education, which is often the highest level of education they receive.

Educated women have the same job opportunities as men, and the same salary rates are applicable to both the sexes. However, most women are employed in lower-paying jobs like food vending and subsistence farming.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In Gambia, marriages are traditionally arranged by the families. In urban areas, however, the practice of arranged marriages is disappearing fast. Polygamy is

legally permitted in the Gambia, and about 40 percent of all marriages in Gambia are polygamous.

Gambian women are allowed to date and generally begin when they're in their teens. Usually, a third party facilitates meetings between men and women. Women generally do not openly show signs of love or express their feelings.

Customary laws generally govern the legal age of marriage in Gambia, and most women marry in their teens. Gambian women retain their maiden names after marriage.

Men are the heads of the household and in charge of making all the important decisions. Although women have legal rights to own property separately, traditional customs forbid the practice.

In Gambia, the primary role of a woman is to be a mother. This expectation makes infertile women highly vulnerable to social stigma and divorce.

In the event of a divorce, the children can either remain with the father or the mother, as there is no clear law to indicate who gets custody of the children. The woman must also return any gifts given at the time of marriage, including the dowry paid by the man.

Health

In Gambia, women do not have equal access to healthcare and medical services, mostly due to their inferior position in society.

The standard of medical care in Ghana is very low, with statistics revealing that only 55 percent of all births in Gambia take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. The maternal mortality rate is estimated at about 720 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is about 80 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Gambian law requires women to obtain the permission of their husbands before making healthcare decisions. Contraceptives, for example, are provided to a woman only with her husband's consent.

Women in the Gambia have access to birth control methods, and family planning services have been around for decades. However, contraceptive use among women in Gambia is just 18 percent. One reason for this low rate is that these services are not provided to women under the age of 21.

Interesting Social Customs

In the Gambia, there are certain interesting notions regarding pregnancy. Gambians believe that seeing a pregnant woman in a dream is a sign of trouble. Another interesting belief is that the children of a pregnant woman who eats eggs will be born deaf and dumb.

Women in Business

General View

The cultural and traditional practices of Gambia have always relegated women to a subsidiary role in their agrarian economy. Women are still primarily involved in agricultural activities and the poor economy of the country gives them few, if any, other options.

Women have little representation in the formal sector and rarely hold high positions in companies. The reforms and policies of the government enacted in 1985, which

concentrated on the education and health of women, have empowered women to a certain extent.

Legal Rights

Gambian law, based on English, Islamic, and customary laws, grants equal rights to women. The Gambian Constitution gave women the right to vote in 1960.

Inheritance practices based on customary law allow women to receive only a small portion of the property on the death of her spouse. A male relative of the husband usually inherits the property and, in fact, the widow herself has the choice of being inherited by the brother of her late husband or returning to her family without any assets or money.

Women earn only half of what men get in the agricultural sector and there is a smaller pay differential in the formal sector.

Women in Professions

Gambian women primarily take part in agriculture and related fields. They are also involved in the tourism industry by selling handicrafts and produce and by working in hotels. They are not legally restricted from doing any job.

The prevalent gender discrimination in employment inhibits women from holding high managerial posts. Women make up only 13 percent of managerial positions, and their access to better positions is restricted by lack of education and job availability.

One of the few successful women in Gambian business is Mbasally Bojang. She started as a petty trader of traditional clothing in a village in north Gambia with the money she got from *Osusu* group (a traditional saving method). Later, she expanded her business into selling juice, cool water, and ice blocks with the help of the Gambia Women's Finance Association.

Gambian women dress conservatively in loose garments to avoid revealing their body shape, but modern Gambian women wear Western outfits.

Normally mothers, grandmothers, or members of the extended family take care of the children of working women. A few organizations provide on-site day-care services.

Women as Business Owners

Most Gambian women are involved in subsistence farming and petty trading in the informal sector. Typically they engage in rice cultivation, livestock rearing, and the marketing of horticultural products. Other businesses of Gambian women involve sewing, textiles, handicrafts, and fish processing. They usually run micro- or small-scale industries because of the lack of capital or proper training and the burden of family responsibilities.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Gambians, though hospitable by nature, regard women as inferior to men, so foreign businesswomen can expect some impediments in doing business with local businessmen. Gambians always greet people and appreciate similar behavior from foreigners. As a safety precaution, foreign women should not walk alone in isolated areas or at night. Gambia is a predominantly Muslim country, so visitors should remember that alcohol and pork are prohibited.

Georgia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women are highly respected in Georgian society and have been traditionally considered the homemakers and upholders of social and community values. Today, traditional stereotypes of gender roles are changing, and many women have better paid jobs than their fathers or husbands. Women also receive benefits such as pregnancy leave and earlier retirement. They are subject neither to compulsory military enlistment nor to specific dress code restrictions.

Women actively participate in politics and comprise 63 percent of the membership of political parties. Women are poorly represented, however, in Parliament (6.4 percent) and at higher levels in administrative, legislative, and executive bodies. Women have a fair representation in the judiciary, with women judges comprising 48 per cent of the entire judiciary. Business has also seen increasing participation of women, with this participation growing at 35 percent per year. More women have also entered occupations such as construction and information technology, long considered male strongholds. Rural women, however, are socially and economically repressed.

Legal Rights

Georgian laws provide equal rights to all, regardless of gender, and women have rights to vote, drive vehicles, and own and inherit property. Married women have equal rights to joint possessions. Abortion is legal, and women can apply for a divorce. Child custody in the event of divorce is most often granted to women, although both parents retain rights to make decisions on child rearing and support.

Education

Women in Georgia receive primary and secondary education on a par with men and have a literacy rate of 100 percent. Schooling is coeducational, and single-sex schools are non-existent.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Marriage is based on the free will of the partners and is not prearranged except, occasionally, among Muslims. Women usually date starting in their mid-teens. They generally meet their counterparts at educational, social, and work settings. Online dating is also becoming popular.

The minimum age for marriage is 18 years, although Islamic law permits the marriage of minors. Women have the same rights as men to own and manage property, including that acquired upon marriage. Married women do not usually take their husband's last name.

Polygamy is socially and legally unacceptable for all except those in the Muslim minority. Childless and divorced women have low social standing in Georgian society. In case of divorce, women usually get custody of the children, even though both parents have equal rights to child custody.

Although most urban women admit that they prefer to work, they are not absolved of domestic responsibilities. Men do only half as much, or less, of the housework.

Health

Women have equal access to healthcare services and longer life expectancy rates than men. The state provides regular medical care and reproductive assistance to pregnant women. The rate of congenital deformities at birth is nearly 6 percent (compared to the normal rate of 2 percent) because of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. There is also an increased incidence of cancer and premature births as a result of radioactive exposure. Birth control is culturally acceptable, but only 17 percent of married women choose to use it.

Women in Business

General View

Georgian women are traditionally homemakers, upholders of community and social values, and breadwinners. The Georgian economy has diversified from its agricultural roots, and the government is working to ensure that women play an active part in the country's new economy.

Georgia's efforts to advance the status of women are complicated by economic difficulties and internal conflict, but the establishment of quotas in employment has resulted in increased job opportunities for women.

Legal Rights

Georgian legislation is quite formal concerning the equality of rights. Women have the same right as men to vote and participate in elections and constitute about 63 percent of the members of political parties. Women also have equal rights to make contracts relating to loans and real estate and to own and administer property. A married woman has an equal right to possession of that household's property. Women also benefit from legislation on paid pregnancy leave.

despite these general rights, there still exists a gender differential in salaries. A 2004 estimate puts the average salary of employed women at only 58 percent of that of men.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, women were engaged in activities such as agriculture, spinning, knitting, baking, and cheese making. Today women form 28 percent of legislators, managers, and senior officials. A survey reveals that approximately two-thirds of the journalists working in the Georgian mass media are women and that the number of women who head these bodies or participate actively in their decision-making process has greatly increased. The advertising business also attracts a large number of young women as designers or advertising agents.

Top-level political and business jobs remain a male stronghold and are less accessible to women. Women are prohibited from hard physical labor, such as mining.

The domestic unit in cities is the nuclear family. The absence of any state-sponsored childcare and the limited availability of kindergartens have forced retired grandparents to live in an extended family and help raise children. The UN actively supports female employment in Georgia and insists that the government provide such incentives as state-sponsored childcare.

Women as Business Owners

Women entrepreneurs typically own businesses related to fashion designing, food processing, agriculture, hotels, and cottage industries. Women are also venturing into fields long considered male realms, including information technology.

Georgian women entrepreneurs include Ketil Berulava, an innkeeper and trout farmer; Maia Aladashvili, a loan officer and pawn shop owner; and Mariam Kikacheishvili, a fashion designer.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen will find Georgia a welcoming place to do business. Visiting businesswomen shake hands with an associate at an initial meeting and, over time, it may be appropriate to kiss on the cheeks. Oral communication and eye contact is vital in conducting business in Georgia. Western business attire is appropriate.

Organizations are strictly hierarchical; ideas are welcomed from anyone in the company, but decisions are left solely to the discretion of the owner/manager.

The gregarious and hospitable Georgians may think nothing about offering drinks to complete strangers in a restaurant. The offer is often followed by an unending string of elaborate toasts. Visitors should be wary of venturing out after dark and carrying valuables, as street crime is common.

Germany

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Germans supposedly attribute to Kaiser Wilhelm II the description of the German woman's purview as *Kirche* (church), *Kinder* (children) and *Kuche* (kitchen). That definition, needless to say, severely discouraged women's participation in many areas of Germany's traditionally male-dominated culture, well into the 1970s. Things have changed since then, and German women today are becoming active participants in most areas of society.

Society treats women and girls in Germany, for the most part, on par with the men, though they still have to deal with taking care of the household and rearing the children. Women enjoy almost equal representation as men in most areas of German society. However, many working pregnant women or mothers of newborn babies face discrimination in the workplace in the form of expectations that they stay at home and take care of the children. Social and economic status plays a relatively minor role in determining women's opportunities in Germany.

With the government amending its laws to support women's involvement in all areas of society, the role of German women is changing. Traditional discriminatory attitudes have increasingly become irrelevant, allowing most women the freedom to choose their careers and their spheres of participation in Germany's public life.

In the political arena, women occupy 195 of the 614 seats in the Lower House and 13 of the 69 seats in the Upper House, which translates to a share of 31.8 percent and 18.8 percent respectively. In the 2005 elections, Angela Merkel became Germany's first female Chancellor.

German women occupy 30 percent of all the seats in the judiciary. Though women enjoy heavy representation in the medical sector, making up 75 percent of Germany's total medical personnel, the sector mostly relegates lower-level positions to women. Thus, only 4 percent of all physicians in Germany are women. Women comprise about 28 percent of

the population in the self-employed business sector. Statistically, Germany compares poorly to many European nations in terms of the number of women it actively employs in mid- to high-level management positions.

The role of women in urban and rural areas does not differ noticeably, with both making important contributions to Germany's economy. The same applies to women from various social and economic classes in Germany.

Germany serves as home to many ethnic groups, such as the Gypsies, Sorbs, Danes and Frisians. The role of women in each of these individual ethnic groups differs according to their traditional customs and beliefs.

German women do not have dress code restrictions, and most of them follow Western European styles of dressing.

Legal Rights

The German Constitution provides women with all the same legal rights as the men. This means they have the right to drive cars, own and inherit property, and vote—a right granted in 1918.

Laws permit abortions during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy in Germany, though they must be performed in a recognized hospital or healthcare center, and women must attend a pre-abortion counseling session.

Women in Germany can also initiate divorce proceedings. In the event of a divorce, women have equal rights in claiming custody of the children.

Education

German women enjoy equal access to education, with the female literacy rate standing at 99 percent, on par with the men, according to 2003 estimates.

About 99 percent of German girls attend primary school and secondary school. German women make up 54 percent of the entire student population at the university level, and outnumber men in some educational streams.

German boys and girls share the same classroom space, though schools in many large municipalities do not follow the coeducational system.

Educated German women have access to the same job opportunities as the men, though in reality, men far outnumber women in applying for most positions.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

German women choose their own spouses. Dating has become widely accepted, with the concept of arranged marriages almost non-existent. Women usually start dating in their early teens, and the most common venues for men and women to meet include educational institutions, social events, and bars.

The legal marriageable age for German women is 16 years, though the law permits exceptions in unusual circumstances. Most Germans, however, marry in their mid or late 20s, with a career often taking precedence.

Most German women take their husband's names after marriage, though they sometimes add it to their own, creating a double-barreled surname. In the event of a divorce, German women revert back to their maiden names.

Germany has a large number of single-parent families, and women often head these households. Women also have substantial influence in most family decisions. German women may legally hold assets separately from their husbands.

In a divorce, women have an equal share in the conjugal property as well as the right to claim custody of the children. The court usually makes the final decision on child custody.

Thirty percent of German women between the ages of 30 and 40 remain childless, and Germany attaches no stigma to having no or few children. In fact, Germany has the highest rate of childlessness in the world.

Polygamy is neither legal nor socially acceptable in Germany, though German laws do recognize polygamous unions originating in countries where the practice is legal.

Health

Women enjoy the same access to health care as men. Germany's very high standards of health care allow women all over the country easy access to many hospitals and healthcare centers.

The standards of medical care for German women prove excellent, with 100 percent of all births taking place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. Maternal mortality rates for 2004 were 8 deaths per 100,000 live births and infant mortality rates for 2006 stood at 4.12 deaths per 1,000 live births.

German women do not need the consent of their spouses to make their own healthcare decisions. Germany records a high rate of contraceptive use, with statistics indicating that more than 75 percent of German women use some form of contraceptive.

Interesting Social Customs

German men usually walk or sit to the left of women. When greeting a German woman, direct eye contact should be made and held, just as when greeting a man.

Women in Business

General View

German women work hard but have less to show for it than women in many of their fellow E.U. member states. In 2002, 64 percent of all women aged between 15 and 65 with children were employed. The employment rate for women in the East German states was 8 percent higher than that of women in former West Germany (71 percent versus 63 percent). That said, Germany is still dogged by unemployment, particularly in the East and among workers with limited technical skills; so, many of the jobs women hold are part-time or lower-wage positions.

In 2004, a comprehensive German government survey indicated that while women made up 47 percent of the German workforce, only 33 percent of all managers were women. Furthermore, only 21 percent of senior executives were women. All of these figures were higher than the previous survey, which only covered the former West Germany, but the data still goes to show that German women remain in the minority when it comes to management.

The highest proportions of female executives were found in the services sector and public administration, with 53 percent and 39 percent, respectively. In construction, women only made up 14 percent of all managers. Small and medium-sized enterprises are somewhat more likely to have women senior executives than large firms.

Working women, according to recent surveys, attribute the difficulty they have in working in Germany to general societal prejudices and the stress of balancing their corporate careers with their family life without the kind of "social safety net" that their more affluent E.U. neighbors have. One example of the less liberal social policies in Germany is that under Germany's welfare reforms, any woman under 55 who has been out of work for more than a year can be forced to take any available job or lose her unemployment benefit.

The increasing number of women in politics has been striking and may have a positive impact on women's legal position: Germany has elected a female chancellor, Angela Merkel; the number of seats in Parliament went from 8.4 percent in 1980 to 32.8 percent in 2003; women head 6 of the 13 federal ministries; there are 40 female ministers in the state governments; and the number of women elected to positions in city and local administrations also continues to rise.

Legal Rights

Germany's Constitution and Basic Law provides women with all the same legal rights as the men, including the right to own and operate businesses as well as own and inherit property. German women received the right to vote in 1918. In 1977, women were guaranteed the same rights as men in family financial matters.

Although gender-based pay discrimination is prohibited, German women only earn around 75 percent of the salaries earned by men performing the same jobs. Specifically, in 2002, women in full-time employment in the service sector earned 30 percent less than their male colleagues, and women working in industry earned 26 percent less than their male counterparts. This gap is prevalent in both the public and private sectors, and Germany's pay gap between the sexes is estimated as the largest in the European Union. Interestingly, in the East

German states, female industrial workers earn 94 percent of male salaries.

Prostitution was legalized in 2002 as a means of reducing organized crime.

colleagues. When entering a room, the eldest person enters first, and men enter before women, if their age and status are roughly equal.

Women in Professions

Traditional jobs for German women were in teaching, nursing, salons, retail clerking, secretarial, and cleaning sectors. Despite various hurdles faced by German women, their outlook is bright. Various companies have recognized the problem and have initiated programs to encourage women's participation in a bigger way. The government, too, has taken steps to encourage women to start their own businesses. Notable German business leaders include: Maud Pagel, senior vice president of human resources for Deutsche Telekom and Katharina Elisabeth Lemm, the owner and managing director of Content GmbH, a company that provides consultation and project management services for commercial operations, finance, accounting, and controlling sectors.

The only professional area that German women were barred from was the army; but, in 2001, Germany was forced to amend its laws when a German woman, Tanja Kreil, won a case in the European Court of Justice after her application to join the army was rejected. German women can now serve in all army positions, including those that involve direct combat.

German women do not have any dress code restrictions that prevent them from taking up certain jobs. And if the mother works, the extended family or by day care-centers generally assume childcare roles. State-sponsored childcare is also available.

Women as Business Owners

Germany's economic laws are not very conducive to starting new businesses. Start-up costs are high, and formidable bureaucratic red tape tends to stifle the growth of new business ventures. This makes it even more remarkable that since German reunification in 1990, 150,000 new female-run companies have been launched. German women now make up 28 percent of all self-employed entrepreneurs. This number, while relatively low compared to other developed economies, is slowly growing, fuelled by new government laws and the initiation of various programs to assist women entrepreneurs. An example is a program instituted by Deutsche Ausgleichsbank to provide a range of loans and credit assistance specifically to women entrepreneurs.

A breakdown of businesses started by German women shows that a majority of them opt for the trade and services sector; followed by personal services that include hairdressing, childcare, teaching, culture and sports; followed by the healthcare and social service sectors; and, finally, consulting. One in 12 entrepreneurs in Germany is a foreign-born.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen rarely face any problems conducting business in Germany. Business meetings are very formal and adhere to rigid protocol, with very little time wasted on small talk. German businesses are strictly hierarchical, with the chief executive making all final decisions. Titles and honorifics are important in Germany, so one can expect them at introductions. Always use titles and honorifics when addressing your German

Ghana

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Ghanaian women live socially, politically and economically disadvantaged lives. Men have dominated, and continue to dominate, women in all spheres, including family life. Women shoulder responsibility for the household chores and the family. Rural women also engage in agricultural activities, though they are not entitled to own the land. They must depend on men for all decisions in their lives.

Society prohibits women from performing certain jobs or venturing into various sectors for employment. Nonetheless, Ghanaian women have a flair for market trading. Some very successful women thrive in this sector, especially in some regions like Kumasi and Accra. However, women's participation in even such formal sectors does not give them the freedom to make decisions, not even in relation to family planning and sex.

Women's representation in politics also proves limited. In 2005, 25 women sat in the 230-seat parliament, out of which 4 served as ministers, and 14 as deputy ministers. Three women served as council of state members, out of a total of 112 members.

Although Ghanaian women participate actively in trading, they still find themselves limited by their duties as homemakers, their lack of understanding of savings, poor credit facilities from financial institutions, and the lack of sophisticated business culture. For these reasons, most of them own and operate only micro-level enterprises.

With more economic power and support from their men, women are increasingly taking up the responsibility of providing better education and health facilities for their children. Some female-based associations as well as the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs are taking steps toward bringing more women into public life, so that they take an active part in public policy-making.

Rural women remain the hardest hit, as they manage responsibility for all household chores and also work in the fields. Urban women, like urban men, live more independent and progressive lives.

Some sub-cultures and regions treat older women with respect and also allow them to make decisions on behalf of the whole family. Women in the *Adangme* and *Ga* cultures stay very active in petty trade, especially in the fish and wholesale trade markets. *Ewe* and northern Ghanaian women remain more agriculture-oriented. Except the *Akan* group, all other communities are patrilineal and patrilocal.

The traditional Ghanaian dress reflects an adaptation of the Victorian dress, comprised of three pieces: the *kaba*, the slit, and the cover cloth. This attire proves suitable to the country's climate and also to women's roles.

Legal Rights

The Ghanaian constitution prohibits any kind of discrimination and gives equal rights to women along with men. Every sane Ghanaian citizen over the age of 18 has the right to vote.

Customary laws do not support Ghanaian women in relation to inheritance. Solely the men in the family control property. This becomes more complicated when the man practices polygamy, as the law is not clear about inheritance in such cases.

Women can initiate divorce, a simple and easy procedure. Courts generally grant the divorced woman custody of any children. Women also have access to primary education, but the proportion of dropouts remains alarmingly high.

Women have the right to have an abortion only under certain conditions. These include: danger to the woman's life due to the pregnancy, probable child deformity or disease, and pregnancy due to rape or incest affecting a mentally retarded woman.

Education

Ghana provides education equally to both boys and girls. The ratio of boys to girls enrolled in elementary schools was 55:45 in 1984. The ratio declined at the secondary school level, as many girls drop out of schools due to social or economic pressures. Just 17 percent of women enrolled in Universities in that year. The figures had not improved much, even by 1991. In 1999, 69 percent of girls enrolled in primary schools, and only 28 percent of girls enrolled in the secondary level in that year. The adult female literacy rate in 2004 reached 46 percent.

The low level of education keeps women at a disadvantage in seeking jobs. Their chances of remaining unemployed are twice as high as men.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Traditionally, adults in the house arrange marriages. In some cases, the women do not meet their husbands at all before marriage. Intra-lineage marriages are not encouraged. These days, urban youth increasingly prefer to date and choose their partners.

The average marriage age in Ghana is 20 years for women. The minimum legal age for marriage is 18 years, and the law prohibits child marriage of any sort, including making the girl a pawn in bride-price transactions. Married women have begun to take their husband's surname only recently.

Polygamy, banned by law, remains a fairly common practice in Ghana. In 1988, about 33 percent of married women lived in polygamous marriages. Ghanaian society expects women to conceive children. The husband can even divorce a woman who cannot conceive.

In case of divorce, a caregiver can apply for custody or visitation rights under the Children's Act of 1998. The courts consider several issues like age of the child, the pros of giving custodial rights to the mother, continuity of care, preferences of the child, and even the issue of keeping siblings together, while granting custodial rights. The non-custodial parent can request visitation rights.

Health

The healthcare system in Ghana performs unfavorably regarding care for women. It fails to focus on contraception and reproductive issues. Women remain unaware of health and nutrition issues, leaving the entire family susceptible to

illnesses. Social and economic limitations, as well as non-availability of healthcare facilities, also deprive many women of basic health care. Pregnancy-related deaths are very common, indicated by the high maternal mortality rate of 214 per 100,000 live births. The rate climbs to as high as 500-800 in the Northern region.

Although the government's population policy encourages voluntary family planning, most women remain dependent on men for making decisions about reproduction. Culture attaches stigma to the use of contraceptives, as some men believe that use of contraceptives deems women promiscuous. As a result, the percentage of women using contraception measured at just 13 percent in 1998. Women who use contraception prefer the use of birth control pills.

Interesting Customs

Women endure several harmful rites in the name of tradition. One such custom involves torturing widows after the husband's death. This can include throwing pepper into her eyes or tying a noose around her neck and parading her around the village.

When a man weds several women, he makes certain arrangements to keep peace in the house among the co-wives. Either the wives live together along with the husband in the same house, or just the first wife lives with the husband in the house, with the rest of the wives being housed elsewhere. In another kind of arrangement, everyone lives separately, with each wife meeting the husband on a scheduled day. The husband also arranges all household chores.

A unique model of gender separation exists in some regions. For instance, in *Ga*, all the men within the same lineage live in one structure, while all their wives and other female family members live in another nearby structure.

Women in Business

General View

The women of Ghana have always worked in close harmony with their immediate neighborhoods. Even today, a majority of women still combine their daily domestic activities of housekeeping and childcare with small enterprises using their traditional skills. Many of them own livestock or poultry, which serve as both food and income; they also make oil from palm, coconut, and groundnuts. Other common businesses are dry-season vegetable farming, batik-printing, basket and mat-weaving, soap-making, fish-smoking, and petty trading. These home-based, small-scale enterprises ensure extra income for family upkeep. Only a few women can be found in the industrial and technical sectors today.

Legal Rights

Ghanaian women have had the right to vote since 1954 and are legally able to own and manage businesses. In the matter of inheritance, however, the custom of married Ghana women continuing to reside at their maternal home after marriage has the unfortunate effect of making it almost impossible for them to inherit a share of their husband's property. Women earn less than men for doing the same job. This discrimination continues even today, and is more pronounced in the informal employment sector.

Women in Professions

The traditional focus of women has been on homemaking. After their domestic chores, it was customary for Ghanaian women to tend to cattle, work in the fields, chop wood, and sell farm and poultry produce in the open market. These roles began to get more organized with the arrival of educational programs, welfare organizations, skills training, health education, workshops on family welfare, and many other awareness programs.

A small percentage of women have emerged as teachers, auxiliary nurses, health visitors, clerks, and entrepreneurs. A general resistance to women entering non-traditional fields persists even today, which leads to under-representation in many professions. Among Ghanaian women who redefined their role in society, Gladys Asmah holds a special place. She served as the first woman deputy minority leader in Parliament and as a Minister for Women and Children's Affairs. Her contribution to promoting female education and socio-economic empowerment is widely acknowledged. Her commitment to women and children's issues has earned her the name *Mama* all over Ghana.

Another prominent Ghanaian woman is Dr. Ester Afua Ocloo, chairperson and managing director of Nkulenu Industries Limited. A food scientist and human resource development specialist since 1942, she established food processing and preservation factories in Ghana, ensuring job opportunities for hundreds of women.

Women are not barred from joining any profession, and there are dress code restrictions for specific jobs. The traditional attire of a long frock and loose turban is accepted in all parts of Ghana, although Western-style clothes are increasingly worn these days. Grandparents, older siblings, or other relatives mostly care for children of working mothers. State-sponsored childcare centers are also coming up in various parts of Ghana. Private companies are also encouraged to set up daycare centers for their female employees.

Women as Business Owners

A number of women entrepreneurs in businesses are involved in poultry and dairy products, textiles, pottery, handicrafts, food preservation and packing units, garments, batik-printing, and jewelry-making. Many of these women entrepreneurs come from the rural areas. Ghana has initiated Women's Development programs to help train women in their business enterprises and obtain easy access to credit facilities. These programs have triggered off a positive response from the rural and urban women alike.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although women are respected, foreign businesswomen may find Ghanaian men formal and polite but distant in Ghana. Patience, gentle perseverance, and some knowledge of Ghanaian culture are needed to win trust and co-operation. Ghanaian men are apprehensive of women they perceive to be aggressive, so businesswomen need to keep this in mind. While visiting a Ghanaian household, it is considered well-mannered to single out and greet the senior-most family member. Any friendly invitation to a meal or tea should be honored. The people of Ghana take great offense if guests reject food they offer, or if they leave anything uneaten on their plates. Ghanians also enjoy post-dinner dancing and singing, and an enthusiastic participation in these activities can help in furthering relations.

Greece

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The traditional roles of men and women in Greece, as breadwinners and homemakers respectively, have changed over the last few decades. Women now make up around 45 percent of the total paid workforce, and better educational standards and equal employment opportunities have put them on an equal footing with men both economically, socially, and legally. Modern urban women are now more likely to take up formal employment and to continue their employment after marriage and motherhood. Greek women are still, however, a minority at top managerial levels.

Women's participation in politics is also minimal at just around 13 percent (38 women in the 300-member Parliament) and just one female cabinet member. New legislation attempts to address this situation by ensuring that all political parties must reserve 30 percent of seats for women.

In the judiciary, women represent around 22 percent of state justices and nearly 50 percent of supreme administrative court justices. However, there are just three women among the 62 Supreme Court justices. Although medicine has always remained a woman's domain, the number of women in top management roles is very low. The proportion of women in the civil service is the lowest among E.U. countries at 5.8 percent.

In business, around 40 percent of women work in clerical jobs and 18 percent are in managerial positions, another 28 percent are self-employed. Women entrepreneurs are mostly engaged in small businesses, but they are making their presence felt in areas like tourism, publishing, advertising, and interior design. Rural women still face hurdles to pursue an education or career due to social constraints rather than the lack of resources. Women who belong to certain cultures, like Muslims or Roma (Gypsy), are likely to have very different experiences than other Greek women.

Women's attire is diverse in Greece and ranges from suits and formal dresses in the workplace to traditional costumes during festivals. In social settings, women like to wear fashionable dresses, including revealing ones.

Legal Rights

Women in Greece enjoy equality on par with men in all respects. Article 2 of the Constitution pledges equal rights and obligations to all, and Article 22 guarantees equal pay for equal work for all, irrespective of gender. The Family Law of 1983 gives equal status to both spouses in relation to decision-making and familial responsibilities. Men cannot prevent a woman's right to work or hold property.

Women have the right to vote, drive, own and manage businesses/property, and even inherit equally. Women have full reproductive rights. Abortion is legal up to 12 weeks of pregnancy, if there is risk to the life of the woman, or if there is a possible abnormality or deformity of the child. Women also have the right to initiate divorce

proceedings. They are eligible to receive an equal share of the property and custody of children after divorce. They can also claim maintenance under certain conditions.

Education

Nine years of education is compulsory in Greece. The female adult literacy rate is 88.3 percent, compared to 94 percent for men. Women still gravitate towards courses in the sciences, humanities, and social sciences rather than more technical subjects. Female students make up the majority of students at university level with over 53 percent of total enrollment. This level of participation has led to an increase in women in almost all sectors.

Co-education is widely prevalent in Greece except in some religious schools. Educated Greek women have the same job opportunities as men, although, overall, wage disparity between men and women is around 32 percent.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages are no longer the norm in Greece, as youngsters now choose their own life-partners. Young people date and experiment sexually starting in their teens. The median age for marriage is in the late 20's for women due to longer dating periods and the increase in live-in relationships. Adolescent marriages, however, still remain common in some communities. Polygamy is illegal in Greece, but some instances occur in the Muslim community. There is no stigma attached to childless women now, but women with male progeny are still esteemed.

Women generally take the husband's personal name as their middle name after marriage and their father-in-law's personal name becomes their surname. They may also take the husband's surname, though it is not mandatory. Women have to forfeit the name after divorce, except under some conditions.

Both spouses are responsible for all decisions in the family as per the 1983 Family Law. However, Greek men still have a tendency to over-protect and dominate their women and still wield the authority in most households. Upon divorce, the custody of the children may be given to both parents jointly, only to one of them, or to a third party. Both parents are responsible for the financial maintenance of the children. Greek women have the right to hold assets separately from their husbands.

Health

Greek women have reasonable access to quality healthcare facilities in public hospitals, although there is some shortage of skilled healthcare personnel in rural areas. The maternal mortality rate was nine deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000. Greek women have the right to make their own healthcare decisions including reproductive decisions. The use of contraceptives is high at 64 percent due to their wide availability. Abortion is considered a common type of contraception, so rates are quite high. The overall birth rate dropped over time from an average of 2.2 children per woman in 1980 to 1.3 in 2004.

Interesting Social Customs

Orthodox Greek Christians wear their wedding ring on their right hand following a Roman custom. The Latin word for left (*sinistra*) has negative connotations with bad luck.

Women in Business

General View

Higher education and changes in social attitudes have encouraged women to compete for decision-making roles, either as owners of businesses or heads of organizations. Today, women make up about 45 percent of the Greek labor force. Legislative measures and labor programs addressing the needs of working women have also contributed to this change--these include special training programs, business subsidies, part-time employment, amendments to family law, childcare centers, prohibition of gender discrimination in employment advertisements, and dissemination of information through media. The Greek anti-gender discrimination policy is considered one of the best in the world.

Legal Rights

Women have the right to vote and can own, manage, and inherit property or assets on equal basis with men. The Family Law of 1983 made equality for women in these and other areas a legal requirement. The constitution guarantees equal employment rights, including equal pay for equal work. Still, 2004 statistics show women's earnings in Greece amount to only 75.8 percent of men's earnings.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, both men and women engaged in agriculture and trade. Women were, and still are, primarily responsible for household tasks, with minimal help from the men. It is estimated that women fill 64 percent of newly created managerial positions in the public sector and occupy around 82 percent of all new posts. In 2000, women held 18 percent of managerial level jobs. Among high-level female professionals, over 55 percent are employed in the education and medical sectors, while those with technical expertise work in health services or in the stock market, real estate, and related fields.

A few Greek women have reached the upper echelons of management. The most prominent is Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, who has worked in politics and business, but is known for acting as president of the bidding and organizing committee for the 2004 Summer Olympics. *Fortune* magazine named her as one of the 50 most powerful non-US female business leaders, and she also placed on a *Forbes* most-powerful women list. Although few women have senior positions, women continue to enter traditionally male-dominated fields like law and medicine in substantial numbers. Women's unemployment remains higher than men's, according to a 2004 report.

Women are not barred from any particular type of work in Greece. However, most women tend to work as retail trade employees, office employees, and unskilled employees. Few women work in technical fields like engineering or construction. As for dress codes, there are

none for women in or out of the workplace. Greek women tend to be fashion-conscious and dress with care.

When caring for children aged 3 and under, working women often get childcare help from relatives like grandparents. Children over three years are sent to nurseries, playschools, or kindergartens. State-sponsored childcare is limited, and the government is taking steps to set up more childcare centers in many areas.

Women as Business Owners

Better education has allowed many women to inherit existing family businesses or set up new ones, albeit on a small scale. The Total Entrepreneurial Activity was 3.5 percent for women and around 8.5 percent for men in 2004. Greek women are most active in sales; other popular ventures include advertising agencies, interior design, tourism agencies, and publishing.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen in Greece should encounter few issues. Doing business successfully in Greece depends entirely on connections, so take any opportunities for relationship-building that arise.

Inviting a male colleague for a meal may be misinterpreted. Invite a group of colleagues, or invite your associate's spouse to join you. Make arrangements to pay in advance, and be polite but firm if your guest tries to pay. Visiting women should also know that it is not unusual for strangers or business associates to pay women complements. If this happens, respond politely.

Guam

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The traditional matriarchal culture of Guam gave women equal status in society. Sweeping changes in gender roles during Western colonization gave women lower social status than men, but despite their marginalization, women continue to play a prominent role in Guam's politics and economy.

The Chamorro people give great importance to the family and women play a vital role in familial responsibilities. Women have traditionally managed the family's resources, land, and finances. Even now, children give their salary to their mothers and get their personal allowance from them. Traditionally, the eldest daughter takes care of her parents in their old age.

While men dominate political positions, women have taken leadership roles in social, religious, and cultural organizations. Guamanian law (U.S. Territorial Law) has mandated that all government boards and commissions appoint at least two female members. Chamorro women have played a key role in Guam's political leadership. Madeleine Bordallo, the former Lt. Governor is the delegate of Guam to the United States House of Representatives. Guamanian women have some degree of representation in the judiciary and business as well.

Ethnic Chamorros occupy only half the Guamanian population, but dominate the territory's politics and social life. Although socio-economic differentiation is not intense, women belonging to upper echelons of society have better opportunities than those in the lower strata. Rural women engage in subsistence farming and fishing and have relatively poor access to education and health facilities.

There are no dress code restrictions for Guamanian women, who generally dress modestly in skirts or knee-length shorts.

Legal Rights

Guam is an unincorporated territory of the U.S., and it follows the Federal Organic and Revised Organic Act of 1950. Guamanian laws assure women equal rights in all aspects of life including the right to vote. According to law, women inherit land and other property equally from their parents.

Abortions are legal only when two doctors who act independently ensure that the pregnancy endangers the life of the mother or will seriously affect the physical or mental health of the mother. Guamanian women have legal rights to initiate divorce proceedings. Courts award child custody in the best interests of the child taking into consideration the preferences of older children. The non-custodial parent has equal visitation rights. The non-custodial parent pays a percentage of his/her income for the maintenance of the child.

Education

Guamanian law mandates all children to attend school from the age of six till the age of fourteen, the completion

of eighth grade. The state provides free education and does not discriminate between boys and girls. Guamanian men and women have a similar high literacy rate of 96 percent. Women equal men in all levels of schooling, and lots of women enroll in universities. Despite their high educational qualifications, they still lag behind men in job opportunities.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Guamanian women have the liberty to date and choose their own partners. Traditionally a man seeks the consent of the girl's parents to date and goes courting with a family chaperone. These days, young people dispense with the chaperone, but they do get the permission of their parents for marriage.

Legally, a Guamanian woman can get married at the age of 18. Minors require the written consent of their parents or guardian for marriage registration. Although monogamous marriages are the norm in Guam, the society tolerates the presence of concubines. Generally, couples agree upon a common clan name after marriage.

Most Guamanian women have control over the economy of the family. Guamanians follow the practice of *poksai* (a form of adoption) by which a childless woman can bring up a niece or a nephew. Upon divorce, both women and men get an equal share of the property acquired after marriage and all community property except when an agreement is drawn in favor of someone. Usually, the child custody is awarded in the best interests of the child. Guamanian women can own property separate from their husbands.

Health

Guamanian women have equal access to healthcare facilities. Guam's healthcare system is comprised of two major hospitals, a network of clinics, several general and specialized medical practitioners, and efficient medical evacuation operations to Hawaii, the U.S. mainland, and the Philippines. The Guam Department of Health also provides prenatal care, nutrition, and health education services to women in disadvantaged areas. Guam's low infant mortality rate of 6.8 deaths per 1,000 live births illustrates the good health-care facilities women receive. Generally, women make their own healthcare decisions. Contraceptive pills are available free of charge, and the increase in the usage of family planning techniques has resulted in lower birth rates.

Women in Business

General View

Guamanian women work in traditional agricultural and fishery enterprises, service and supply businesses for military bases, and in the traditionally female professions of nursing and teaching. They occupy nearly 37 percent of the total work force and bear their domestic responsibilities in addition to their paid work. Despite the persistence of gender disparities, many Guamanian women hold senior posts in economic and political sectors.

Legal Rights

The Territory of Guam follows the U.S. Federal Organic and revised Organic Act of 1950, which grants women equal rights under family law, property law, and in the judiciary. Guamanian women have the right to vote and contest elections and the right to own and manage businesses.

According to law, sons and daughters inherit equally from their parents. Women have the rights to own, buy, or sell property at their will. Generally, Guamanian women earn equal pay for equal work and have good representation in the lower and middle ranks of government.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, rural women of Guamanian take part in subsistence farming and fishing. The island's women often find occupations in the educational and health sector as teachers and nurses. Among the Guamanian women holding high-level positions outside the government are: Dr. Rosa Roberta Carter, the first female president of the University of Guam; Elizabeth Barrett Anderson, a lawyer for Guam's board of education, a member of the legislature, and a judge on Guam's superior court; Kristal Koga, a designer and owner of the Kristal Kollection boutique, who is a vocal proponent of encouraging young women to build business careers and Guam's Small Business Administration Women in Business Champion for 2006; and Eloise Baza, the first female President of the Guam Chamber of Commerce.

In the last decade, women have shown considerable interest in developing their organizational skills. Guamanian women are not barred from any occupation or profession, and there are no dress code restrictions. Women dress modestly in formal clothes for business situations.

Working women usually seek the help of grandparents in child rearing or use private daycare centers. The lack of publicly funded childcare centers poses a significant problem for working women.

Women as Business Owners

Traditionally, Guamanian women have owned businesses related to agriculture and food production. Now they have a presence in the tourism industry and in making and selling handicrafts such as braiding and embroidery. Supplying goods and services to the U.S. military bases is a major activity. Small Business Development Centers offer women counseling, training, and technical assistance in all aspects of business management, as well as access to credit.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Guam's business culture is similar to that of United States (English as the official language, a business-friendly government, modern infrastructure), and Guamanians treat foreign businesswomen with respect. Generally, Guamanians invite business colleagues for drinks or dinner at a restaurant after business negotiations. Women should dress formally in suits or dresses for meetings.

Guatemala

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Poverty, illiteracy, and the general lack of education, health care, and employment have conspired to make the lives of Guatemalan women among the most difficult in the Western hemisphere. Guatemalan women remain fairly dependent upon men, and the majority of them work in the household.

They receive support from international organizations (U.N. bodies, NGOs) and foreign governments (the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, the U.S., and Sweden) to promote education, organization, leadership, and skills training opportunities in order to eventually, increasingly participate in the commercial, legal, and political leadership of their country. Still, women's representation in politics, law, medicine, and business remains very low, although it has improved over the years. The 158-seat Congress now seats 14 women members; 2 female ministers serve in the cabinet; 6 women serve as presidential secretaries, 9 out of the 331 mayors in the country are women, the Supreme Court of Justice includes 2 female justices (including its president), and 17 percent of all judges and magistrates are women.

Ladino (non-indigenous) women have made more progress in the business arena than indigenous women. Urban educated women receive some respect, but society does not yet regard them as equal to men.

Women generally engage in small businesses like small laundrettes, beauty salons, food stalls and restaurants, dressmaking, and bakeries. The textile industry serves as one of the main employers of women, with many women owning small textile businesses. Overall, 25.8 percent of women participate in the manufacturing sector.

Rural women can be identified by their colorful wrap-around skirts and blouses, while urban women dress Western and like wearing jeans, blouses, knee-length skirts, and khaki trousers.

Legal Rights

Literate women received the right to vote in 1945, but it took until 1965 for illiterate women to be given this right. Women can own, inherit, and manage property independently.

Lawmakers in recent years have implemented many changes in the law, with the intent of uplifting the status of Guatemalan women. They passed a law to prevent and punish intra-family violence. Lawmakers also changed Article 232 of the Penal Code to prevent married women from being punished because of unfaithfulness.

In 1998, a bill was presented to the Congress that proposed a quota of 44 percent for women's participation in politics. The bill, opposed by most deputies of the ruling National Advancement Party, did not pass.

The Labor Code, which regulates issues relating to working women, still puts women in the category of minors. Many women remain unaware of their labor rights and continue to be exploited by employers.

Until 1973, Guatemalan law prohibited abortion, subjecting both the woman and her abortion-performing healthcare provider to punishment. This law has been amended to allow abortions that protect the life of the woman, and records show a corresponding increase in the number of abortions.

Separation and divorce as defined by the Guatemala Civil Code can take place at the request of one or both spouses. A divorced woman can sue her former husband for a share of their communal property to support herself and any minor children.

Education

All Guatemalans can receive free education without any discrimination. In spite of this, women's literacy levels remain very low in Guatemala, and striking educational disparities exist between rural and urban Guatemalans. The official literacy rate for women in 2001 was 61 percent, although a human rights ombudsman put the figure for indigenous women at approximately 75-90 percent. Women complete just 1.3 years of education on average, as compared to the total average of 2.7 years. In urban areas, 74 percent of girls had access to primary education in 1988, as compared to just 49 percent in rural areas.

Furthermore, just a third of rural girls enroll in secondary education compared to the number of rural boys who do so, while the ratio of urban girls and boys in secondary education proves almost equal. The proportion of women pursuing university education ranks much lower than that of men.

Women face a lot of discrimination in employment although the constitution grants gender equality. They find employment in informal sectors, service sectors, or smaller industries. Indigenous women earn just 58 percent of men's earnings, while the non-indigenous women earn 71 percent of what men earn. Women also receive lower wages than men for performing the same kinds of jobs.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Parents sometimes arrange marriages, although love marriages are quite common. Young people, especially those belonging to middle and upper-middle classes, meet their prospective partners in private clubs or in private schools. They start dating in their teens, usually at around 15 or 16 years.

The legal marriageable age is 18 years, and the average marriageable age is 20 years for urban women, or slightly lower among rural women. Men over the age of 16 and women over the age of 14 can also marry with the consent of one or both parents, or with the approval of a civil judge.

Nuclear families function as the norm, even as the couple stays with the boy's or girl's family initially. Women have the right to take their husband's surname after marriage. Either of the spouses can receive custody of the children in case of divorce. The spouse perceived to be at fault for the divorce or separation loses custody of the children. Polygamy is illegal.

Families remain patriarchal, with men dominating the decision-making. Women take charge of the household and the children. Although women have the right to own

and manage property, they face some restrictions under the Civil Code in relation to joint holding of property in a marriage. The law considers a husband the sole manager of joint property, and this role can only be challenged by the wife if there is any danger to the property.

Health

Life expectancy and maternal mortality rates in Guatemala continue as the worst in the Central American region, with 66.4 years, and 248 deaths per 100,000 live births (320 in rural indigenous areas), respectively. The infant mortality rate has come down from 136 in 1960 to 36 in 2002. Lack of access to health care, ignorance about health issues, illiteracy, and poverty constitute the primary reasons for this sorry state of affairs. Urban people fare better and have more access to healthcare centers.

Men make all decisions relating to health care and reproduction. Three-fourths of all births take place at home with no trained medical attendant, and under unhygienic conditions. Some 65 percent of go without antenatal checkups, which contributes to several pregnancy-related health disorders.

Women use contraception at a low rate (31.4 percent overall), and this rate is much lower, at just 13 percent, among indigenous communities. Preferred contraception methods include sterilization, birth control pills, IUDs, and condoms.

Interesting Social Customs

Widows can not remarry until 300 days after the husband's death. Society affords them social isolation and exile from the village; widows maintain a lower status.

Women in Business

General View

The majority of Guatemalan women, 65 percent, work within their homes and work their private plots of land. Other Guatemalan working women are active in all parts of the economy, working in agriculture, manufacturing, as small traders, and in the service sector.

Agricultural work is primarily coffee production (land clearing, pruning, greenhouse work, and quality control), grain production, and small-scale production of vegetables, fruit, and beans. Women's involvement in manufacturing mostly involves clothing assembly, where women make up roughly 80 percent of the employees, and the number of women working in the industry has grown by more than 30 percent in the last 10 years due to the establishment of *maquilas*, large factories turning out large quantities of low-cost garments. Service industry work is typically domestic labor, door-to-door sales, or work at hotels and restaurants.

Guatemalan women also operate many small-scale businesses that are an extension of their domestic work, including dressmaking, baking, cheese-making, and *tortilla*-making. The government is slowly working to help more women acquire higher education so they can have more employment options.

Legal Rights

Women in Guatemala were granted citizenship only in 1945, enabling them to vote. A literacy clause, however, prohibited illiterate women from voting until 1965.

Guatemalan women also enjoy equal rights in managing, owning and inheriting property. Gender is not a bar to the inheritance of land, houses, or personal belongings. Inheritance is dictated by a duly witnessed written or oral testament. As many die without fulfilling this requirement, family disputes are very common after death among both the Maya and Ladino communities.

While Guatemala's constitution guarantees equal rights to men and women in employment and do not bar women from any profession, their right to work in certain fields is prohibited due to their marital status and/or motherhood. The labor code also has an inherent bias in that its regulations on issues related to working women equate women with minors.

Illiteracy, lack of proper identification documents, lack of awareness of their labor rights, lack of collateral they can use to borrow, exploitation by some employers, and generally discriminatory practices impede women's chances of getting jobs or of acquiring land, credit, and housing.

Women also do not receive equal remunerated. Women earn only 43 percent of men in the industrial sector, 60 percent in commerce, and 63 percent in the service sector. The disparity in wages between men and women runs even higher among technicians, managers, and administrators. Furthermore, the average income of women in the informal sector (employing 65 percent of all working women) is only 35 percent that of women working in the formal sector.

Those well-educated women who have been able to become owners and managers (mostly Ladino women) are often highly respected, and their authority is not questioned.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Guatemalan women engage themselves in domestic work and cottage industries like sewing, cooking, and processing food like cheese, bread, and candies taking precedence. Educated Guatemalan women typically find jobs as secretaries, clerks, teachers, and nurses. Only a few women in Guatemala hold executive positions in business—among them: Victoria De Pena, CEO of the Doctor Louis Foundation and Fanny de Estrada, executive director of the Gremial de Exportadores de Productos no Tradicionales.

Common work attire for women are blouses, skirts below the knee or khaki pants, and comfortable sandals or loafers.

Mothers, grandmothers, and young nannies hired from the rural areas care for the children of middle- and upper-class Ladinos. Maya women in rural areas have older children help care for the younger ones, and their infants are often wrapped in a shawl and carried on their backs. Guatemala has no state-sponsored childcare.

Women as Business Owners

Women entrepreneurs are few in Guatemala, and most are found in the textile and processed food industries. Strong competition in the textile sector has driven prices low and put pressure on profitability. Food businesses typically involve the processing of domestic products like meat (chicken, beef, pork), coffee, grains (wheat, corn), sugar, cotton, cacao, vegetables, fruit, and spices (cinnamon, cardamom). The manufacture of beer, rum, cigars, and paper goods are also prominent. In the service sector, women concentrate on beauty salons, small laundrettes, restaurants, and food stalls. Lack of credit poses a serious problem for women entrepreneurs, often compelling them to take small loans at exorbitant rates.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The local culture assumes that men have the upper hand in decision-making and that women only act at the direction of their superiors; so, visiting businesswomen may encounter this attitude.

The average Guatemalan is pretty laid back, so visitors should exercise patience and courteousness at all times. It is considered polite to speak softly, and it is customary to make social conversation before beginning business discussions. Avoid discussions of domestic politics. Guatemalans prefer business breakfasts or lunches to dinners. Hosts like to have male guests seated on their right and women on the left. Smoking is generally acceptable. Guatemalan friends often embrace and pat each other on the shoulders, but this is not expected from a business acquaintance, unless a strong friendship has developed. A light handshake while taking leave is the norm between men and women and people of the same gender. Traveling alone is generally safe in Guatemala, but having a companion decreases the likelihood of any sexual harassment or pick-pocketing.

Guinea

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Guinean women have yet a long trek to make in achieving social, political, and economic equality with men. The average Guinean woman exists as part of a polygamous marriage, proves illiterate, works in the fields, has around five children, and dies by the time she is 48 due to overwork and lack of healthcare facilities.

Guinean culture, predominantly patriarchal, treats men, and even boys in the family, better than women. Women work very hard, both at home as well as outside, to supplement the family's income. Domestic violence, sexual harassment including marital rape, legal discrimination, prostitution, and female genital mutilation exemplify some of the problems women face in Guinean society. Girls receive very little education even at the primary level, as they are made to seek employment or to help with household tasks. The number of households headed by women hovers around 15 percent nationally, while the percentage in the region of Moyenne Guinée has increased to around 26 percent.

Rural women invariably remain involved in agricultural and other related work. A large proportion of urban women, however, engage in informal trading/marketing.

In 2005, women held around 19 percent of the seats in the lower house of Parliament, and the proportion of women holds constant at the ministerial level as well. Women's participation in other important sectors like law, medicine, and business also remains low. The ratio of male to female lawyers is 2.5:1, while that among bailiffs and notaries increases to 10:1 and 5:1, respectively. A few businesswomen achieve success, but most remain limited to specific sectors like retail trading. The proportion of women in medical fields, even as nurses or midwives, ranked very low in 2000, at just 0.1 percent.

Women in urban areas who have been educated and enjoy employment in high-level positions in the private sector prove more progressive both outside and at home. Women in senior positions in the private or public sector are a rarity and hold a lot of influence.

Guinean women don more or less conservative attire in public places.

Legal Rights

The Guinean Constitution offers equal rights to men and women in most necessary aspects. Traditions still dictate an inferior position to women, especially in cases of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property. Customary inheritance laws allow women to inherit only one-eighth of the property.

Women received the right to vote and contest in elections in 1958. Women can acquire and manage property independently under Article 13 of the constitution. Article 325 of the civil code gives women the right to enjoy and dispose of their personal assets and property, and to operate a bank account in their name. The law, however, remains silent about widows', especially childless widows', rights to property.

Women can initiate divorce, but their testimony carries less weight than that of men. The law permits abortion only to save the life of the woman or to protect her physical or mental health.

Education

Although primary education remains free and compulsory for all in Guinea, very poor education rates for girls in Guinea correspond directly with female literacy rates—just around 22 percent. Girls' inducement into employment or household tasks at a very young age accounts for the enrollment of girls reaching just 35 percent at the primary level and 15 percent at the secondary level, compared to rates of 73 percent and 33 percent, respectively, for boys. Girls and boys share the same classrooms in Guinean schools.

Educated women more often find better employment in the private sector in the cities. However, they face discrimination in recruitment and pay, even with the same level of qualification and experience as men.

Dating, Marriage and Family

The adults in the family arrange marriages. The groom pays dowry or bride-wealth to the bride's family in the form of livestock, clothes, or cash. Child marriages prove common, although the minimum marriageable age under law is 18 for men and 17 for women. In polygamous marriages, socially accepted and more rampant in rural areas, co-wives exist harmoniously together, sharing the household and outside tasks. Urban men, however, prefer monogamous relations due to financial and social constraints.

Marriage customs differ on the basis of social class, ethnicity, or region. In urban areas, young people socialize in groups. Men and women maintain a certain physical distance in public. Only some urban youth observe civil registration of marriages, even though only civil registry officials can solemnize a marriage. Women need not take their husband's name after marriage.

Women generally manage the household in Guinea, devoting up to 17 hours to housework and other occupations like weeding the fields and taking care of kitchen gardens.

Childless women carry a particular stigma in Guinean society, especially widows, whom society deprives of their husband's inheritance. The Guinean government is trying to address this issue.

Even though women can initiate divorce, divorce laws remain highly discriminatory towards women in matters of custody of children and communal property.

Health

Most public and private medical centers make healthcare services available. A medical dispensary operates in almost every district. However, in some volatile regions, people have difficulty accessing them. People trust in both Western and traditional medicine, but financial constraints and illiteracy lead many towards traditional medical practices like magic.

Infant mortality rates high in Guinea, at 90 deaths per 1,000 live births, in 2006.

Women financially dependent on men usually defer to men to make decisions regarding health care. Family planning has also met with a lot of resistance, in spite of the very high fertility rate of around five children per woman. The use of contraceptives has increased, however, over the last few years. The number of women making their own healthcare decisions is also increasing. Since Guinea generally prohibits abortions, a very high number of induced and illegal abortions take place.

Interesting Social Customs

Female genital mutilation remains very common in Guinea. Guinea subjects females within the age group of 4 and 70 to this traditional practice, even though it impairs women's health and can even cause death.

Women in Business

General View

Guinean women work extremely hard. They constitute the majority of the workers in agriculture, which employs more than 80 percent of the country's workforce, and they balance household chores and other economic activities on top of their work in the fields. Although women's economic participation is quite high, their representation in decision-making positions is almost nonexistent due to poor educational and employment opportunities as well as social constraints.

Guinean women's literacy rate is extremely low at just 21 percent, and this directly affects their ability to participate in many jobs or professional areas like medicine and law. Urban women are generally more educated and tend to favor jobs in sales and the service sector.

Guinean women are attempting to address the impediments to education that are holding them back, through pressure on the government and help from nongovernmental organizations. Improved access to financial allowances and credit from the government and financial institutions would also help women to start small and micro- enterprises.

Female representation in politics includes four out of 25 ministers and three out of 14 members of the Supreme Court.

Legal Rights

Guinean women received the right to vote and contest elections in 1958. They are also legally guaranteed general economic and social rights on a par with men. The laws relating to inheritance, however, overtly favor men, and the laws regarding equal pay for equal work are not enforced, resulting in a wide disparity in the earnings of men and women for similar jobs. Women are also discriminated against due to the higher levels of absenteeism that result from pregnancy and child-rearing responsibilities.

Women in Professions

About 77 percent of women work for pay in Guinea (versus 89 percent of men) and agriculture and allied fields are the primary occupation for over 70 percent of Guinean women. Self-employment is also prevalent, but men are paid substantially more than women in the informal sector, so it is generally a last resort avoided by educated women.

In professions, women prefer public sector employment where they face less discrimination in terms of wages and opportunities. The proportion of women in the civil services was 23 percent in 2000, and a majority of these employees were operating staff and contract workers with few middle-level and executive level managers.

In formal employment, the highest proportion of women worked in sales and services, at 75 percent in the year 2000. Professional, administrative, technical, and unskilled manual jobs employed the remaining 25 percent of women. The proportion of working women in academics is also very low at just 10 percent of teachers in private schools.

There are a few businesswomen and famous female executives in Guinea. These include: Hadja Mariama Bah, owner of a clothing line for women; Madame Djeinabou Kanté, owner of a cloth-dyeing business; and Madame Mariama Bah, owner of a popular restaurant in Mamou.

Women are not barred from taking up employment in any particular sector or position. Dressing for professional women borders on the conservative. Provocative dresses are usually avoided, especially in public places.

Working women generally take the help of relatives, paid nannies, or older children to take care of young children. The government is taking steps to introduce more community childcare centers to encourage women's participation in education and employment.

Women as Business Owners

Self-employed women are found only in a few sectors like retailing and typically "feminine" fields. Women trying to start their own businesses face inadequate access to credit facilities and a lack of business skills due to poor standards of Guinean education. The government, however, has taken various measures to introduce more women into business. New areas where women have received training and technical assistance to start their own businesses include seed production, fruit/vegetable/cereal processing and conservation, functional literacy training, stock management, financial management, nutritional health and food hygiene, livestock raising, retail milk sales, and veterinary assistantship.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Guinean people are very conservative in speaking and guard their words initially. Humor is, however, welcome if it is not ironic or sarcastic. Forming a personal relationship is important before venturing into a business relationship, so it is appropriate to initiate small talk at the beginning of a meeting to get to know potential Guinean partners.

Foreigners, especially women, should take care of their personal security and belongings because the country is subject to civil unrest and border regions are insecure.

Guinea-Bissau

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Guinea Bissau is one of the poorest countries in the world, and poverty takes a particularly heavy toll on the female population. About 80 percent of women in Guinea Bissau live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their day-to-day livelihood. Women occupy an inferior position in Guinea Bissau's male-oriented society and live in some of the worst conditions in the world. Men uniformly occupy dominant positions in society. The *Bijagos* tribe, the single exception, has a matriarchal society.

Women and girls are poorly treated on average. Physical abuse against women is seen as an acceptable way of resolving domestic quarrels. A number of tribes in Guinea Bissau practice female genital mutilation, sometimes in its most extreme form.

Social and economic class distinctions are few in Guinea Bissau, as most citizens suffer from poverty. The few women who belong to the more privileged sections of society have greater access to education and healthcare.

Though steps have been taken by the government and non-governmental organizations to improve the lot of women in Guinea Bissau, not much change has occurred. Laws prohibit gender-based discrimination, and the country has signed and ratified the Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, but these rules are not enforced.

In politics, women hold 14 of the 100 seats in the National Popular Assembly (ANP), and two of the 19 government ministers are women. In the judiciary, the Supreme Court justice is a woman. Women rarely become doctors or lawyers, and are almost unknown as executives or business managers.

Rural women face greater hardships than their urban counterparts and often have heavy workloads that include working in the fields, herding livestock, and other domestic chores. Traditional customs and practices have a greater hold over rural women than urban women.

Guinea Bissau is made up of ethnic tribes such as the *Fula*, *Mandinga*, *Balanta*, *Manjaco*, and *Papel*. The position of women varies in each of these tribes, depending of their unique customs and practices.

Women in Guinea Bissau do not have any particular dress code restrictions. Most women wear conservative or traditional clothes.

Legal Rights

Guinea Bissau's laws provide women all the same legal rights as the men and forbid gender discrimination. However, the gap between law and reality remains large.

Women in Guinea Bissau earned the right to vote in 1977. The Constitution allows women to own and inherit property, though the traditional customs of some ethnic tribes forbid it and often take precedence.

Abortions in Guinea Bissau are legal only when performed to save the life of the mother. No other

exceptions are permitted, though the abortion law is not strictly enforced. The consent of a woman's father or husband is required for legal abortions.

Women in Guinea Bissau have the legal right to initiate divorce, though divorce is in fact often governed by traditional customs. Women can also claim custody of their children.

Education

Though women in Guinea Bissau have equal rights to education, their access is severely limited, especially in rural areas. This is reflected in the literacy rate, which, as of 2003, stood at only 27.4 percent for women, as compared to 58.1 percent for the men.

About half of all girls in Guinea Bissau enroll in primary school, and most of them do not attend school after fifth grade. The few girls who are lucky enough to continue through secondary school usually go on to complete their higher education.

Most women, even those who are well educated, work at informal, poorly paid jobs. Men are preferred over women for most positions, which are few and far between.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Though arranged marriage is the norm in traditional areas and among certain ethnic tribes, such as the *Fula* and *Mandinga*, an increasing number of urban youth choose their own spouses. The practice is slowly spreading to rural areas as well. No one dates in Guinea Bissau, though men and women are allowed to meet, especially in urban areas. Men and women meet at educational institutions and social events.

The mean marrying age for women in Guinea Bissau ranges from 13 to 16 years. Legal marriage age is 14 for girls and 16 for boys. Women in Guinea Bissau do not take their husband's names after marriage.

The traditional customs of some ethnic tribes prohibit women from holding property. It is very rare, though possible, for a woman in Guinea Bissau to hold assets separately from her husband.

Polygamy is practiced in many areas and its prevalence varies from tribe to tribe. Usually, each wife is given her own hut and the husband spends time with each of his wives on a rotational basis.

Men normally act as providers and expect the women to take care of all the household duties, which include cooking, cleaning, rearing the children, herding cattle, and other domestic chores. There are women-led households, caused by the death of the husband or by male migration to cities in search of work. These households are often chronically poor, more so than households led by men.

Children are highly valued, and Guinea Bissau's women are expected to bear as many as possible. Guinean women, on average, give birth to seven children. Being infertile can cause social problems for a woman.

According to traditional customs in Guinea Bissau, a man usually performs a period of "bride service" for his father-in-law, which entails working on his father-in-law's farms

for a certain number of days per year. In the event of a divorce, the wife is expected to pay for the bride service received before the marriage, though women with children may sometimes be exempted. Custody of the children varies between ethnic tribes, with some of them awarding custody to the father and others to the mother.

Health

Healthcare services in Guinea Bissau are virtually non-existent, especially in the rural areas. Even cities have limited healthcare facilities. Most women use traditional medicine instead.

Skilled medical practitioners attend only 35 percent of births. The maternal mortality rate as of 2005 stood at 528 deaths per 100,000 live births, while the infant mortality rate was 105.21 deaths per 1,000 per 2006 estimates. Women in Guinea Bissau are required to consult their husbands or fathers before making any healthcare decision.

Guinea Bissau does have a government-sponsored family planning program aimed at reducing the high population growth, which, at the current rate, is set to double the population in the next 23 years. Women have little knowledge of modern contraceptive methods, and most resort to traditional forms of birth control. Only about 8 percent of married women of childbearing age use contraceptives, but recent studies have shown that birth control use is increasing in urban areas.

Interesting Social Customs

Food-related taboos are common. For example, eating eggs is considered bad for a woman's fertility.

During breastfeeding, a mother's milk is tested by placing a little milk in a gourd and dropping an ant into it. If the ant survives, the milk is deemed good; if not, the mother is made to perform special ceremonies to rid her of impurities. A mother who has lost many children is automatically considered to have "bad milk," in which case her children are nursed by other women or given cow's milk.

Women in Business

General View

Guinea Bissau is one of the poorest countries in the world, so it is no surprise that the country does not offer much by way of business opportunities for women. Urban women in Guinea Bissau work in government jobs, perform domestic duties, and trade various commodities in the market. Rural women perform household chores, work the fields, and also involve themselves in the local market.

Guinea Bissau's government is initiating programs and taking steps to increase the participation of women in various areas of public life. Policies, plans, and strategies that focus on gender equality have been given greater importance, as has increasing the educational, health, nutritional, and skill levels of women. This has led to greater participation of women in the country's economic sector. However, lack of funds, education, and skills has seen this participation mostly limited to micro and very small-sized businesses or trading in various basic goods.

Legal Rights

Granting women the right to vote in 1977, the Constitution of Guinea Bissau provides women with all the equal legal rights that men enjoy, including that of owning property

and operating businesses. However, traditional customs and practices followed by various ethnic tribes prohibit women from owning assets.

The women of Guinea Bissau suffer gender-based pay discrepancies, earning only about half of what their male counterparts take home for performing the same jobs.

Women in Professions

The most traditional jobs for women in Guinea Bissau are in agriculture, with more than 80 percent of all women involved in the sector. In the urban areas, the most common jobs for women consist of teaching and clerical, or other positions in the government. Few women hold prominent roles in leadership positions in Guinea Bissau, but Maria do Ceu Silva Monteiro, who became the president of the Supreme Court, is a very notable exception.

The outlook for the growth of women in business is bleak, given the formidable barriers they face in terms of poverty and illiteracy. There are a few women-owned small businesses in Guinea Bissau, but their impact is economically negligible.

The only jobs from which women in Guinea Bissau are legally barred are those involving night work for minor women 16 to 21 years old if the work is likely to adversely affect their health. No dress code restrictions prevent women from taking up certain jobs. Work attire is traditional, particularly in rural areas, and in urban areas more modern or Western styles are more prominent.

For working mothers, relatives and members of the extended family usually assume childcare duties. State-sponsored childcare is not available in Guinea Bissau.

Women as Business Owners

Women-owned businesses, of which there are very few, are usually micro- or small-sized; these include: female traders, known as *bideiras*, who deal mostly in small garden products, cashew nuts, winemaking, and fresh vegetables; women living in the forest areas, who trade in wood, straw, charcoal, and palm oil; farm women who breed chickens, goats, and other livestock; and women involved in aquaculture and fishing, especially for shrimp.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Local businesspeople in Guinea Bissau usually treat foreign businesswomen with respect. Although Portuguese is the official language, French is widely spoken.

Doing business is made more difficult by the facts that there are not many facilities where credit cards or traveler's checks can be used, and telephone services can prove very expensive. It is advisable to use anti-malarial medication since malaria is common and local health facilities are very poor. Sensitivity to local culture and customs is important. A country with a large slim population, it is advisable to plan trips to the country before or after the holy month of Ramadan, since business hours are affected. Clothing is also conservative in Muslim-dominated areas but more Westernized in the urban areas.

Guyana

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Guyanese women actively engage socially, politically, and economically, despite patriarchal attitudes and poverty. Better educational opportunities have enabled them to surpass men in some sectors of employment, allowing them a very important role in the economic development of their country.

Greater participation in politics and public life has ensured that women's issues have been given more importance in policy-making. A variety of laws including the Domestic Violence Act (1996), the Prevention of Discrimination Act (1997), and the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (1999) now provide more legal protection for women.

A noticeable shift in social attitudes about women's role in the society has also taken place, marking an increase in the number of households headed by single women, and an escalation in cohabitation rather than marriage.

Although many women still limit themselves to being teachers, farmers, nurses, clerks, and civil servants, many women also head public offices and business establishments today. In 2005, women comprised 30.8 percent of Parliament, with 20 women out of the total 65 members. A woman also served as Deputy Speaker of the House. Women actively participate in local government and village council politics. In law, women account for 3 judges out of 8, and a woman occupies the position of Chancellor, the highest rank in the judicial system.

Germany has also seen a rise in the number of self-employed women, although most of these women still engage in traditional businesses like garment manufacturing, trade, handicrafts, hairdressing, and food preparation. Rural women also take up agriculture, fishing, and forestry. However, economic activity has increased the burden on women, as they still have to take care of their families while they work. Lack of childcare facilities and non-recognition for some activities like farming has also limited the economic force of many women.

Female unemployment in 1999 reached 14 percent, compared to 6 percent among men. Also, a gap exists between the economic classes, with the poor, rural (mostly Amerindian) women at the bottom, dogged by illiteracy and poverty, and the urban upper classes enjoying access to education and other opportunities. Some communities and social structures force women to take up employment, even at an old age, to support their families; unfortunately, the social security system in Guyana lacks strength.

No dress code restrictions influence Guyanese women, apart from a restriction on shorts, which cannot be worn at the workplace.

Legal Rights

Guyana gives equal rights to all citizens, irrespective of gender or social status. Guyanese women received the right to vote and to run for office in 1953.

The law protects married women in terms of property and inheritance. A divorced woman is entitled to receive half

of the joint property if she has been employed. Otherwise, she receives a third of the property.

Women have control over their reproductive rights in terms of making decisions about contraception, but abortion requires authorization by a panel of doctors.

Laws deem divorce by consent unacceptable. Upon the parents' divorce, the court may grant child custody to both or either one of the parents. Parents may also determine custody by agreement.

Education

Women in Guyana have equal access to free and compulsory education, on par with men. The female literacy rate, in 2003, stood at 98.5 percent, versus 99.1 percent for men, and this provides a testament to the government's commitment to the empowerment of women through education.

Both single-gender and coeducational schools educate children in Guyana, although far more coeducational schools exist.

Qualified women cannot be discriminated against in employment. An increasing influx of women in middle-management positions, therefore, fails to justify the disproportionately low levels of women in senior management. Women's pursuit of technical education enables them to better compete in the job market. Although inequality in pay for men and women persists, its blatancy has decreased.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Traditionally, elders in Guyana arranged marriages, and some communities still follow this system. Religion, caste, class, and economic status remain the primary considerations in these arranged marriages. An increasing tendency towards love and interethnic marriages has emerged in recent years, however. Young people meet in schools, at work, or other social settings, and may date without chastisement. The minimum marriageable age for a civil marriage is 18 years, and laws only permit marriage before this age by parental consent.

The marriageable age is increasing among educated and employed youth, albeit more slowly in the Muslim and Hindu communities. Common-law unions remain widespread, although the law does not recognize such unions as marriage. If parents don't approve of a marriage, the young couple either live in common-law marriage or elope, after which the parents generally accept the relationship.

Nuclear families typify the norm today, and families have become smaller with fewer children. Guyana still cherishes motherhood, however, as highly as it ever has. Nonetheless, modern women can make decisions about their family autonomously. They can also hold property and run businesses independently.

Women can initiate divorce proceedings, and divorced women have the right to custody of the children, either independently or jointly with the father of the children.

Guyana legally prohibits polygamy. Nevertheless, some men do engage in informal marriages, in addition to formal marriages.

Health

Providing efficient health care to everyone in Guyana remains a challenge for the government. Lack of resources and poverty still keep many away from sophisticated treatments and specialists.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1995 has helped many women by making abortion legal until the eighth week of pregnancy. The quality of health care for women, especially prenatal care, has also improved in recent years due to efforts by the government and NGOs. Women receive counseling from the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association and the Family Planning Association of Guyana about their reproductive and sexual rights. Use of contraceptives has also increased over the years. Over 94 percent of women have gained awareness of family planning and use contraceptives.

Interesting Social Customs

Some traditional prejudices against the *Dalits* (untouchables) still linger in the Hindu community of Guyana.

Women in Business

General View

Women in Guyana have little representation in business and the professions due to the many social and cultural barriers that they face. The government has introduced various measures to improve women's lot in the business sector, but women still remain the majority of workers in the country's lowest paid occupations and have little support as they simultaneously fulfill their traditional roles in the family.

Legal Rights

Women in Guyana have the same rights as men in all spheres of political, economic, and social life. They won the right to vote in 1928 and the Constitution protects women against all forms of discrimination. The reality is, however, quite different, especially in terms of inheritance where older sons are routinely favored over widows in matters of inheritance of property. Wage discrimination also exists in the unorganized sector, where women are the majority of workers but receive lower wages than men. Even in the Guyanese Public Service, women constitute 60 percent of the lowest seven salary grades and only 36 percent of the higher grades. A 1999 civil service ruling prompted a raise in the minimum public sector wage, but there is no legislated minimum wage in the private sector. As a result, female workers in the informal private sector receive lower wages, making it difficult for them to maintain an adequate standard of living, particularly in the many single-parent households of underdeveloped urban areas.

Women in Professions

Poor village women experience years of hardship and work. As young girls they have to shoulder the responsibility of childcare, weeding and cleaning the fields, collecting firewood and cow dung, cleaning the home, fetching water, and grinding grain for the daily meal. Many women are domestic workers and nurses, positions that are not subject to a minimum wage. Many women turn to self-employment

or the operation of micro- or small businesses (in wholesale or retail). The few women who do hold senior management positions are treated with respect in the business community. Among these are Sonita Jagan, former general manager and CEO of GTandT; Dawn Murray, head of Guyana Airways, the country's large airline; and Gem Fletcher, a former board member of the Guyana Bank.

There are a few professions barred to women, like cleaners of machinery because of the risk involved in exposure to moving parts. There are no dress code restrictions for Guyanese women, and they generally wear skirts, dresses, and suits.

Children of working mothers are usually cared for by parents, siblings, and relatives. In rural communities children are allowed to roam, and discipline is a communal responsibility. In urban areas, young orphan girls are employed in childcare, while in villages many women carry their infant children to work in the fields, as they lack any facilities for childcare in the villages.

Women as Business Owners

About 75 to 80 percent of the micro-entrepreneurs are women, and a majority of them are single mothers who are able to sustain a reasonable standard of living through their efforts. These enterprises are typically in the agricultural and retail sectors.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen visiting Guyana are generally treated with utmost respect. Visiting businesswomen should be careful in terms of local transportation. Pick a centrally located accommodation and avoid late-night travel or metro rides. While traveling in public transport, sit next to a woman. If you have to make an overnight or train ride and if there is no women-only compartment, choose one occupied by women or couples. Consult with your hotel manager for advice on "safe" and "unsafe" local areas.

Haiti

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Haiti was founded on the Napoleonic Civil Code, which legally subordinates women to their fathers or husbands, and Haiti's laws concerning women have changed little today. Haitian women have faced discrimination throughout history. Although Haiti is sometimes called a matriarchal society, power rests primarily with men.

Traditional attitudes dictate that Haitian women depend on men for all their needs, including their identities and social class, and fill the role of wife, mother, or mistress. Wealthy urban women, however, enjoy a status that puts them on a par with women in developed countries.

Since 1995, women in Haiti have launched movements against violence and discrimination, resulting in a few, largely symbolic, steps by the government to address these issues. Educations levels among women are rising, but Haitian women face enormous challenges. For example, domestic violence is so common that it is not viewed as a crime, but as an accepted social behavior.

Representation of women in politics, law, medicine, and business is poor. As of 2000, women occupied about 33 percent of Senate seats, a huge jump from previous years. However, there were only 3 women in the Congress. Eight women, as opposed to 143 men, figure on the ballot lists for 30 Senate seats. Very few women work in law or medicine.

Participation of Haitian women in business remains limited. Women take care of the family, first and foremost. In rural areas, they also do agricultural work. Lack of employment opportunities force large numbers of women to migrate to urban areas, where they work as street vendors. Some also assemble electronics, manufacture textiles, and work in quarries.

Abuse and discrimination against women exist in all social and economic classes but is more prevalent amongst the poor. Haiti's largest minorities are ethnic Syrians and light-skinned Haitians called "*grimmel*" in Creole. Together, they make up a significant portion of Haiti's middle class, operating businesses and holding land in Haiti's capital. Women in these minority groups normally fare better than the majority of poorer ethnic Haitians.

Women generally wear skirts and dresses, though pantsuits are gaining acceptance. There are no particular dress code restrictions for women.

Legal Rights

Strictly speaking, Haiti's laws guarantee women equality. In spite of that, Haiti's courts frequently rule according to French traditional law, which puts women at a disadvantage. Women who live in common-law marriages do not inherit property from their partners. Since 1950, women have had equal voting rights.

Under Haitian law, abortion may be performed only to save the life of the pregnant woman. In any other circumstances it is illegal and punishable by imprisonment or forced labor.

Women can initiate divorces, though they rarely do. Children are very highly valued in Haitian society, and parents who are legally married usually share custody. If the parents are not married, custody is often decided in court.

Education

There is no legal guarantee of education in Haiti for women or for men. Access to education is limited for all Haitian children, mainly because of poverty. In theory, this puts girls on the same footing as boys, but families who can afford it usually send the boys before they think of sending the girls. There have been documented cases of girls resorting prostitution to raise money for school fees. All this has resulted in a literacy rate for women of about 51 percent, while the literacy rate for men is approaching 55 percent.

Although almost 90 percent of Haitian children enroll in primary school at some time, fewer than half of them reach grade 6. Haitian schools are coeducational.

Women, whether educated or not, have limited employment opportunities. Most work in low-level jobs and are paid less than their male counterparts. It's estimated that Haitian women earn about 55 percent of what men earn.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

The costs of civil or religious marriage ceremonies are beyond the means of most Haitians. The most common form of "marriage" is a common law relationship, known in Creole as *plasaj*, which does not have legal sanction in Haiti. The most binding, though less common, form of marriage is civil marriage. Most women choose their own partners in either form of marriage.

Dating is permissible in Haitian culture, and women begin dating in their teens. The minimum legal age for Haitian women to marry is 15. The average age for a woman's first marriage is 22. Women in rural areas normally marry earlier than their urban counterparts.

Though Haitian law prohibits polygamy, about 10 percent of the men are involved in polygamous relationships. The community recognizes these relationships as legitimate, and these "wives" live in separate homes with their children. However, polygamy has been decreasing, as most Haitian men cannot afford the cost of supporting more than one household.

Haitian women always take their husband's full name after marriage, and are often referred to by his first name (for example, Mrs. Richard). In the event of a divorce, most women revert to their maiden names.

Traditionally, men are the decision-makers, though these days household decisions are often made jointly or by the woman of the house.

Childlessness is a serious cause for concern for Haitian women; it is a ground for a man to divorce his wife or to openly have extra-marital relationships with other women, in the hopes of getting children through one of them.

Custody of children in the event of a divorce between legally married couples is normally shared between the

parents. In the case of an unmarried couple, a court makes the final custody decision. The courts also rule on child support and alimony.

A woman can legally hold assets separately from her husband. However, even in cases where women legally inherit property, they seldom gain access to it.

Health

Haiti is an extremely poor country, ranking 153 out of 177 in the United Nations' 2005 Human Development Index. The public healthcare system is almost non-existent, and sheer poverty means that most women cannot afford to pay for transport to the nearest doctor or healthcare facility. Rural women who migrate to urban areas usually find doctors' fees prohibitively high. As a result, local witch doctors and similar practitioners have flourished.

Only about 60 percent of all Haitians have access to some form of healthcare. The maternal mortality rate is high—up to 680 for every 100,000 live births. Only about 46 percent of babies are born under the supervision of qualified healthcare professionals. Some estimates show that 78 percent of healthcare centers do not have facilities for prenatal care or obstetric services. Infant mortality rates are also high, with about 71 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Women are frequently not permitted to make their own healthcare decisions, which may be made by husbands or elders. Haitian women have access to birth control, though most of them do not make use of it. Although the government directly supports the use of birth control, the United Nations estimates that only 27 percent of married women of childbearing age use contraceptives.

Interesting Social Customs

Haitian social dances are strongly influenced by French dances that originated in the courts and upper classes, like the Quadrille. However, unlike French dances, the Haitian social dance incorporates torso, pelvic and leg movements, and a strong, rhythmic musical accompaniment with roots in Africa.

Women in Business

General View

A majority of women in Haiti engage in traditional occupations like farming, trading, and domestic labor. Although they represent about 55 percent of the country's workforce, Haitian women do not enjoy the same social and economic status as men. This is due in great part to their high illiteracy rate, which limits their professional options, and the lack of other skills that would enable them to compete with their male counterparts.

Most women are employed in low-paying temporary jobs in the informal sector where they confront job insecurity, dangerous working conditions, meager pay, and no labor rights. They also have to balance work and home, since over 70 percent of households are headed and supported by women.

Legal Rights

In 1950, Haitian women were granted the right to vote. Women do not have the right to own land, however, and a woman's share of an inheritance is not guaranteed by law. Furthermore, even though labor laws support women, the

lower pay received by women indicates the evident gender discrimination in both formal and informal sectors.

Women in Professions

Women predominantly work in the informal agricultural sector (where 49 percent of workers are women), in quarries and mines, as sales persons, and in assembling electronic and textile goods (where they constitute 70 percent of the workforce). Women do not have legal prohibitions against pursuing any profession.

There are very few women at the top levels of companies. Josette Perard is a notable exception. She initiated the Lambi Fund of Haiti, which helped a rural community to build its own sugar cane mill.

The public sector does not provide day care facilities for working women, so working mothers rely on the help of family members like older children or grandparents to take care of younger children.

Women as Business Owners

Haitian businesswomen are mostly informal traders, known as *ti machann*, or little merchants. These women typically sell food and other commodities in the streets, relying on donkeys for transportation.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Haitians tend to treat men and women alike. Initial meetings should be used for establishing a warm and reliable business relationship. Business visitors should be firm and formal. Visiting the business partner at home when invited is helpful.

Pointing and whistling should be avoided, especially before elders. Avoid topics like politics or the country's sanitation, and refrain from any public displays of emotion.

Honduras

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Like in other Latin American countries, women in Honduras are emerging out of their one-dimensional roles as homemakers to take an active part in social, economic, and even political spheres. Women in Honduras have always been an important part of the economy, with more than 75 percent of them involved in agricultural production involving vegetable gardening and the rearing of pigs, goats, and poultry. While much of this occasionally seasonal production makes their own family's subsistence possible and, therefore, doesn't conventionally count as "paid work," many Honduran women formally engage in running small businesses or become small-scale producers of handicrafts.

Traditionally, Honduras has maintained a patriarchal society, with men playing very dominant roles, and evidence of this still exists in many rural communities where women depend upon their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons their entire lives. Poverty, illiteracy, lack of education, and, to some extent, the conservatism of the Roman Catholic Church (followed by 90 percent of the population) reinforce this traditional dependent role. Similar conditions can be found among Honduras' various ethnic groups (Mestizo, Miskito, Creole, and Carib people) as well. Urban women tend to be more independent and more active in business and politics.

The 32 female members serving in the 128-seat National Congress in 2005 (25% of seats) provide evidence of the increase in the political clout of women. Furthermore, 9 female members out of a total of 17 members serve in the Supreme Court of Justice. Even the police force, in recent years, has experienced an increase in the enrollment of Honduran women.

Wealthy Hondurans, very fashion-conscious, prefer to wear Western clothes and accessories. Rural and poorer people generally wear imported second-hand clothes.

Legal Rights

Women obtained the right to vote in 1955. The Honduran constitution provides equal rights to all citizens and prohibits any kind of discrimination under Article 60. Women can inherit property after the death of their husbands. Unless a will exists, the widow or widower inherits half share of the property, which is known as the *parte conyugal* (spouse's part), while the children inherit the other half. Sometimes, the eldest son gets a larger share, or only the sons inherit land while daughters inherit other objects like furniture and livestock.

Under the Penal Code of 1983, Honduran women gained the right to have an abortion only under certain conditions: 1) if the pregnancy occurred due to rape; 2) if the pregnancy endangered the life of the woman; or, 3) if there was a chance that the baby might be born with serious defects. However, these provisions under the new Penal Code were repealed due to public pressure.

The older divorce process involved the "innocent" party accusing the spouse of any one of the twelve divorce causes that included spousal abuse, public/notorious adultery, abuse of children, and abandonment. Recently, new legislation made divorce in Honduras much easier to obtain. If one of the partners proves unwilling to divorce, the other spouse can initiate divorce. However, the judge must legally declare the separation. A two-year legal separation merits enough cause for initiating divorce. The 1984 Family Code bestowed more rights on single mothers and also gave more responsibilities to the divorced men in taking care of the children. However, the law is not clear about the division of marital property after divorce.

Education

Honduran women have as many rights and opportunities as men do in education. In fact, women in Honduras today are more literate than men. Women receive an average of four to six years of school education, while men receive only one to three years. Nevertheless, the literacy rate for both men and women reached 80 percent in 2004—a big improvement over the 49 percent literacy rate in 1988. The government provides free and compulsory education for every child between the ages of 7 and 14. Girls and boys share the same classroom space, however.

Women have fewer opportunities for employment, in spite of the gender equality granted by the constitution. Rural women either work in the fields or take up other activities like livestock breeding. Uneducated and poorer urban women find employment in factories or as street vendors. Educated women encounter more diverse job opportunities, although even these usually limit them to certain jobs and sectors.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Love marriages typify the norm in Honduras. Youngsters date and marry people whom they meet in social, educational, or employment settings. The legal marriageable age is 21 years, but people can marry before turning 21, with the consent of their parents or a judge. After marriage, the woman takes the man's patrilineal name with a "de" before it, but has no obligation to keep it after divorce.

Men hold the dominant position in the household, making all major decisions. Women take part in the decision-making and can hold property independently.

In broken marriages, men retain a greater share of the family property after separation or divorce because society considers their financial contribution greater than the woman's. The law is not entirely clear about rules for property division in common-law marriages, and customs tend to hold more sway than law in rural areas. Women received more rights towards custody of the children under the new Family Code of 1984. Society attaches no particular stigma to women who have no children.

Although polygamy has no legal sanction, men having children by multiple women outside of wedlock remains socially acceptable in Honduras.

Health

Privatization of health care has made it more expensive and unaffordable for many Honduran women. In some areas like Misquita and Intibulcá, even basic healthcare services like vaccinations and prenatal care are lacking. In other areas, people have to drive long distances to reach a hospital, which often does not have even the basic supplies.

The maternal mortality rate suffers a very high 400 deaths for every 100,000 births among very young mothers (aged between 12 and 14), and only slightly lowers for mothers aged between 15 and 19. The infant mortality rate hovers at 30 deaths per 1,000 live births. Teenage pregnancies have become very common in recent years due to abuse, lack of awareness among young people, family break-ups, and peer pressure.

Men make decisions about health care, reproduction, and other matters in the more uneducated, poorer, and rural areas, although the younger generation of women assert themselves in efforts to make such decisions. No formal legal framework dictates family planning in Honduras, although Article 19 of the Women's Equal Opportunity Law of 2003 mentions women's right to decide about certain aspects of it such as the number of children or spacing between children. The 2002–2007 National Women's Policy included provisions to strengthen counseling and other services related to family planning.

In 2001, about 62 percent of Honduran women used modern contraceptive methods as compared to 47 percent in 1991. The increase has surfaced in rural areas due to greater government support for family planning.

Women in Business

General View

Traditional prejudices and societal discrimination in Honduras encourage women to remain submissive and confined to household chores and child rearing. Recently, the impoverishment of the country has forced women to participate in the workforce in increasing numbers, but again, gender-biased cultural attitudes are limiting their career opportunities.

Some organizations offer assistance to women, principally in rural sectors. Despite the many educational opportunities available to women, traditional family obligations hinder the ambitions of women intent on obtaining higher education. Women often work in low-status, low-paid, informal jobs such as domestic help.

Legal Rights

Honduras gave women the right to vote in 1955. The law treats women equally with respect to property rights in divorce cases. However, inheritance practices vary, and when a husband dies without a will, the widow inherits half the property and the children receive the other part of the property (sometimes the oldest son inherits a largeshare). The law also permits male children to inherit land, and female children to inherit livestock, furniture, and money.

Labor laws require employers to pay women equal wages for equal work, but employers often categorize women's jobs as less skilled than those of men as a justification for paying them lower salaries. In addition to the improper implementation of laws, women's own ignorance of their

rights contributes to the discrimination against them in the workplace. Women on average receive 60 percent less pay than their male counterparts.

Women in Professions

Agriculture and related fields have always remained the domain of women. Women have also emerged in small-scale enterprises relating to poultry and retail trading. Some Honduran women running their own businesses are Acadia Alvarado, who raises corn, plantains, and yucca; Maria Cristina Diaz Reyes, who sells plastics, pots and pans, and household items; and Maria Irene Escobar, who runs a small store out of her house.

Women are not barred from any profession in Honduras. Women dress conservatively in natural fabrics because of the humid climate of the country.

When women work outside the home, the older siblings usually stay home from school to take care of their brothers or sisters. Due to international and local pressure, some industrial parks now run childcare centers.

Women as Business Owners

Women play a prominent role in the ownership of small and medium-sized businesses that involve less capital and risk. They are largely engaged in agriculture, rearing livestock (poultry, pigs, and goats), or running shops. They play a dominant role in food and fish processing.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although Hondurans treat foreign businesswomen with cordiality, women traveling alone may receive a bit of unwanted attention from men, both visually and perhaps vocally.

Visiting businesswomen should dress appropriately in long skirts or pantsuits to avoid the stares of men in public, and women should not travel alone in Honduras.

Visitors should pack warm clothes for the cool nights and umbrellas for the frequent afternoon showers, especially between mid-May and mid-September.

Hong Kong

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Hong Kong is a blend of Eastern and Western culture, with a patriarchal history, a fast-developing economy, and ever improving prospects for women. Hong Kong women have strong opportunities for higher education and employment, although married women are still primarily responsible for the household and childcare duties.

Nevertheless, with modernization and growing female population (almost 52 percent of total population), Hong Kong has seen rapid growth in female contribution towards the nation's economic, political, and social development. Women comprise 34 percent of the civil service, 41 percent of permanent secretaries, 29 percent of the principal officers, 19 percent of legislators, and 19 percent of government advisory and statutory bodies. They are also occupying male-dominated positions like fire officers, and helicopter pilots, directorate-level government officials, administrative officers, and judicial officers (women make up almost 21% of the judiciary). There are a large number of female doctors and business owners. Female participation in sports, arts, public relations, and community services is also on the rise.

Most of the people of Hong Kong are Cantonese Chinese and, since Hong Kong is also home to many Europeans and Asians, there may be attitudinal differences regarding the role of women among them. But as far as attire, there are no restrictions on dress for Hong Kong women. Women mostly wear western-style clothing in the Japanese sense. Suits and conservative dresses are preferred during business. But Hong Kong women, in general, appear very fashionable and the young generation tends toward sophisticated, high-fashion trends.

Legal Rights

Hong Kong law offers equal civil and political rights to its women and men. This includes the right to vote and contest in elections, the right to drive vehicles, and the rights to own, acquire, and inherit property. Abortion is allowed.

Women also have the right to initiate divorces on many grounds, including adultery, unreasonable behavior, or by mutual consent. Both parents have equal rights to custody of children, with the non-custodial parent receiving visitation rights or even joint custody.

Education

Hong Kong offers free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 15 years, through grade nine. An equal proportion of girls and boys (almost 100 percent children in this age group) attend school. Women's literacy rate was 89.6 percent in 2002 compared to men's rate of 96.9 percent. But women's educational status is improving, and there are more female students than male at university levels, especially in studies of business and law.

Hong Kong has many co-educational and few single-sex academic institutions. Despite increasing educational

levels and employment opportunities, Hong Kong women are absorbed in jobs of lower status and lesser income than men due to gender discrimination.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Hong Kong women choose their own partners, and, after a long courtship, get married with their parents' consent. Dating is practiced by girls and boys from early teens, and they usually meet in educational and social settings. The legal age for marriage is 21 years, but the median age at which women first marry increased from 22.9 years in 1971 to 27.5 years in 2001, compared to men's figures of 27.8 and 30.2, respectively. Minors aged between 16 and 21 can marry with either their fathers' or legal guardian's written approval. Polygamy is illegal in Hong Kong, but it exists.

Women have the right to hold assets separate from their husbands. Although Hong Kong women usually keep their surnames after marriage, the family as a whole is known by the husband's surnames. Some women, however, add their husbands' surnames to their own. After divorce, some women still use their husbands' surnames until they remarry. Childlessness in women doesn't appear to have much stigma attached to it in Hong Kong society, where modern educated women put their careers before anything else. In case of divorce, the custody of children is given to one parent, while the other parent has visitation rights.

In Hong Kong, women are traditionally considered to be in charge of the household while men are expected to serve as the breadwinners. Among educated modern couples, the differences in role perceptions are narrowing, and many share the rights and responsibilities of the households equally.

Health

Hong Kong provides women and men equal access to affordable medical aid. Hospitals and health centers offer services for student health and sex education, maternal and childcare, family planning, and geriatric health care to all women. With its standardized healthcare services, Hong Kong has kept its infant mortality rate at 5.93 deaths per 1000 births, among the lowest in the world. The average life span of women is almost 82.2 years, as compared to 76.8 years for men.

Most Hong Kong women make their own decisions with regard to prenatal and postnatal testing, birth control, use of contraceptives, and abortion. This has helped to keep the country's average annual population growth under one percent.

Women in Business

General View

Hong Kong has one of the freest economies in the world; women's status and role in business is considerably high and approaching equivalence with their male counterparts. Female economic participation has

continued to grow over the last two decades, with many women now employed in the export and trading sectors, data processing, telecommunications, and financial services. However, women have not yet achieved absolute parity of status with men, and they continue to perform their traditional household responsibilities.

Legal Rights

Hong Kong law treats women and men equally regarding their rights to vote, to run for elected office, to own businesses, and to possess and inherit property. Women experience traditional and gender-based discrimination in the practice of these rights, however.

There is no specific law in Hong Kong requiring equality in job opportunities or equal pay for equal work so women earn, on average, only 77 percent of what men earn. The amount of money earned by women, however, has more than doubled over the past twenty years.

Women in Professions

Hong Kong's women have traditionally been employed in the clothing manufacturing industry and in clerical jobs. Women represent 63 percent of those working in the community, social, and personal services sector, 34 percent of civil service employees, and an increasing number of workers in the business, commerce, and manufacturing sectors.

The percentage of female managers and administrators in Hong Kong has increased from 16 percent in the 1990s to 53 percent in 2005. In the government, women hold 3 out of 12 executive council seats, 41 percent of the senior offices in the 17 Permanent Secretaries, 29 percent of the principal offices, 19 percent of the legislative seats, and another 19 percent in the advisory and statutory bodies.

Prominent businesswomen in Hong Kong include Betty Yuen, managing director of CLP Power, who was voted Businesswoman of the Year in 2004; and Marjorie Yang, the chairman and CEO of Esquel Group, a leading international cotton-shirt maker.

The growth rate for women in business is impressive, especially with more women than men entering Hong Kong's export-oriented industries. Statistics reveal that the number of women involved in the trading sector increased by more than 38 percent during the 1990s.

Women are barred from work in underground mines and in tunneling work. There are no specific dress code restrictions for women; in fact, Hong Kong women are known for dressing in smart modern clothing.

Most economically active women rely upon family members, neighbors, or public agencies for childcare. Presently, there are no state-run childcare services, but steps to introduce facilities for child education and training are being planned. A significant number of private crèches, preschools, and kindergartens, registered under Education and Manpower Bureau, are available in Hong Kong.

Women as Business Owners

In Hong Kong, many women run their own businesses, mostly in the clothing, trading, manufacturing, and export industries. Women also own a few Internet-based businesses.

In 2001, 45,000 women were self-employed and 26,700 women were registered as employers. The number of female entrepreneurs in all sectors is gradually rising.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

In Hong Kong, attitudes towards foreign as well as local businesswomen are generally very friendly and polite. Hong Kong in general is known as a good place to do business, with fair and flexible legal and economic policies, a well-built foundation for commercial and physical growth of businesses, and very little government interference.

Women should dress formally for business meetings. Extending business cards (preferably printed in English on one side and Cantonese on the other) with both hands at a first meeting is considered essential. Hong Kong people typically host a formal meal for most business talks and give high importance to personal relationships and trustworthiness.

Always address a person with Mr., Mrs., or Miss, or preferably, the person's professional title and family name (the first part of a Chinese full name). Shaking hands with everyone is common, but body contact such as a hug, a kiss, or a pat on the back is not.

Hungary

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Hungarian culture, characterized by strong stereotypes of the mother and motherland, portrays women as care providers for home and children. It's commonly asserted that there has never been a feminist movement in Hungary, where feminism runs contrary to the traditions and rules of this male-oriented culture.

Legally, the Republic of Hungary ensures gender equality with respect to civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. The year 2002 brought about important changes in the gender equality policy as a result of the shift from a conservative government to a socialist-liberal coalition, and also because of the accession of Hungary to the E.U. The Hungarian Ministry of Justice put forward a comprehensive anti-discrimination act in 2004. Further developments include the elevation of 'Equal Opportunities,' and therefore, the elevation of women's issues, to the ministerial level. Although women achieve higher levels of education and seek employment outside the home more often, social prejudices continue to prevent women's roles from changing substantially.

Women remain poorly represented in the political arena, holding only 8.5 percent of parliamentary seats, which represents a decrease in women's participation in government since Hungary became a democracy. Women fare better in law and medicine; though more women participate in the judicial system as a whole, they remain underrepresented in the top positions, particularly in the office of public prosecution.

In rural areas, women generally assume more traditional roles than their urban counterparts. Women in the Roma minority receive less education, have fewer job opportunities, and start families earlier than average Hungarian women.

Women in Hungary do at least possess freedom to choose what to wear or not to wear. Skimpy tops, micro-minis and short shorts are just as acceptable as slacks, jeans and t-shirts.

Legal Rights

The Republic of Hungary ensures the equality of men and women in all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Hungarian women have general rights such as the right to vote, drive vehicles, and stand for office in any parliamentary, local government, or minority self-government elections. Women also have rights to inheritance, to initiate divorce, and to abortion. In the event of a divorce, courts most often grant women custody of children.

Education

Girls equal boys in enrollment at primary and secondary school levels, with a high and increasing percentage of women at university level. Men and women share the same classroom space in Hungary. Laws on public education prohibit any discrimination on the basis of

gender, and a 2003 estimate assesses women's literacy at 99.3 percent, almost on par with men, who have a literacy rate of 99.7 percent.

Gender discrimination continues to present challenges for women entering the job market. For instance, health care and secondary commercial studies experience high female participation, while heavy industry and construction remain male strongholds.

To circumvent laws protecting pregnant women and women on maternity leave, employers try to avoid hiring young women. In the absence of any effective legal sanction, women often face unpleasant situations such as having to explain their family status at job interviews. The launch of "Family Friendly Workplace Award" by the Office for Women's Issues makes a step towards redressing women's grievances in this area.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Women, free to choose their own mates, normally begin dating in their mid teens. Men and woman today meet through online dating and chat websites, as well as in more conventional meeting places. The legal age for marriage is 18 years, but with the consent of a parent, marriage can take place at 16. Average age for first-time marriage for women has been historically lower than in the rest of Western Europe, and in 1994, it stood at 23.8 years of age. Urban Hungarians generally marry later than their rural counterparts.

A married woman in Hungary can choose to use her husband's name or retain her maiden name. In the event of a divorce, the law permits her to retain her married name until she remarries. An increasing number of young women elect to keep their own surname without any reference to husband and marriage.

Women take care of the domestic unit, and expect men to earn and provide for their families. Only small numbers of young urbanites and middle-aged intellectuals and professionals have recently started changing the traditional pattern of gendered division of labor in the home.

Infertility has no stigma attached to it, and the low birth rate in Hungary averages at about 1.3 children per female. In a divorce, parents can jointly decide on a child custody arrangement. In the absence of a mutual agreement, courts grant custody based on the interests of the child, in most cases to the mother.

The Hungarian Constitution guarantees women equal rights to property, and women have the same rights as men when it comes to using, selling, or otherwise disposing of private assets. Hungary does not condone polygamy, a legal offence punishable by imprisonment of up to three years.

Health

Experts at the Institute for Behavioral Science at Budapest Medical University claim that Hungarian women have fairly good access to the healthcare system, but this has been contradicted by international agencies which have expressed concern at the increasing rate of abortions and high cost of contraceptives. Still, both the

official and the informal levels of society accept family planning and contraception. Women make their own health care decisions, and many of them visit private gynecologists or use the state healthcare system. Records show an infant mortality rate of almost 8.4 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Interesting Social Customs

In Hungary, men walk on the left side of women in the streets, apparently because in the past, gentlemen wore swords on their left; the opposite side thus became the safe side.

Women in Business

General View

Hungarian culture has traditionally regarded women as homemakers, and women are still poorly represented in business and many professions. Recently, however, women have begun to play an increasing role in the business and professional sectors. Many combine both family and business duties without compromising family life through self-employment or by having their family help them to establish small family enterprises.

Legal Rights

Since 1945, Hungarian women have had the right to vote and to be a candidate for elective office. Women also have identical rights as men regarding inheritance and property.

Article 70/B of the Hungarian Constitution includes provisions for equal pay for equal work and equal treatment by employers. Women still receive less pay than men, but a remarkable pay raise for female government employees in 2003 decreased the overall gender pay gap from 16 percent to 12 percent.

Women in Professions

Women primarily carry on the traditional and typical activities of childcare, household work, and tending to livestock and agriculture. Many educated Hungarian women are active in the legal, medical, and teaching professions, and others hold high positions in business, academia, and government. Men still tend to dominate the business world, and the number of women in middle and upper managerial positions in the corporate sector remains low.

Some prominent Hungarian businesswomen include Annetta Hewko, general manager, Lay's Hungary; Zsuzsa Rajki, country manager, Dow Hungary Chemicals Limited; Katl Zoób, fashion designer; and Margeret Dezse, partner in charge of financial advisory services for PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Hungary.

Legislation does not prohibit women from doing any particular job but it forbids women from working from 10p.m. to 6a.m.

There are no dress code restrictions for Hungarian women, who usually dress in skirts and blouses. Depending on industry and geographic location, women may wear jeans or similar casual outfits for work.

Women who work outside the home have access to an extensive network of government-run childcare centers with trained staff. There are few privately run day care facilities.

Women as Business Owners

Hungary has a strikingly high rate of women entrepreneurs. Women mostly choose feminized sectors for their business ventures, including textiles and garments, and retail trade and services. Since 1990, many unemployed women in the villages, particularly the younger ones, have started small businesses. Most are in the service sector or are self-employed professionals (some 23 percent of all working women).

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Hungarians treat foreign businesswomen cordially. They tend to express themselves explicitly and gesticulate heavily. While some may kiss a female visitor's hand, older men just bow their head while shaking hands.

Negotiation tends to move at a slow pace, and business visitors should avoid confrontational behavior or high-pressure sales tactics. Scheduling meetings on Friday afternoons or at any time from mid-December to mid-January is inadvisable.

Iceland

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Icelandic tradition and culture values independent and self-reliant women. In pre-industrial days, women worked side by side with men in farming and agriculture, and women had key roles in decision-making with men. Today, society rarely confines women to domestic chores alone, and affords them equal footing with men at home, at work, and in educational institutions. Boys and girls share equal access to high-quality education, one of the keys to success in Icelandic society.

The depth of the Icelandic commitment to equality can be seen even in the way people choose their surnames. Iceland has a mixture of both patrilineal and matrilineal cultures and under the Icelandic Personal Names Act, either of the parents name can be adopted as a child's surname.

Knowledge, skill, and leadership qualities take precedence over socio-economic background and have allowed all Icelandic women to play an active role in politics and in all professional sectors including law, medicine, and technology. Iceland elected its first woman president, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, in 1980, and she held that office until 1996. Today women hold 33 percent of seats in Parliament.

In terms of opportunities and outlook, little difference between rural and urban women exists, with rural women actually often faring better in skills training and other technical specialties than their urban counterparts. Icelandic ethnic groups like the Norse and Celts do not suffer social or cultural disadvantages.

Dress code restrictions do not exist for women in Iceland. Trousers with shirts and jackets, and skirts with shirts or blouses serve as acceptable outfits in educational institutions and the workplace.

Legal Rights

More gender equality exists in Iceland than in any other country. Women gained the right to vote in 1915 and enjoy all legal rights of men including the right to own and inherit property.

As per Article 9 of Icelandic Law, women have the sole right to decide whether to have an abortion. Icelandic women also have the right to unilaterally initiate a divorce. Icelandic parents have equal rights to custody of children at divorce and, if the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs must resolve a custody dispute, it bases the custodial verdict on the child's best interests.

Education

As early as 1874, Icelandic women had organized various women's schools to promote education among their contemporaries. By 1911, the principle of equal access to education was legally enshrined. Today, no educational ceiling for Icelandic women limits her pursuit of higher education—entirely a matter of personal choice, preference, and dedication. Icelandic law prohibits all gender-based discrimination, and today Icelandic women constitute a majority of those graduating from the

University of Iceland. Iceland boasts a literacy rate of 99 percent. In terms of job opportunities, Icelandic women hold key positions in administrative and executive posts throughout the country, although certain professional areas do have more male than female participation.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Icelandic women generally begin dating quite early, often by the age of 14. Teenagers and young adults form friendships in schools, colleges, parties, workplaces, and even online. They choose their own mates without any involvement from their families other than guidance and support. The average age at which women get married is 29.

Husbands and wives can each own assets outside of the marriage and can dispose of these properties separately. Icelandic law does not require a woman to adopt her husband's name, and retaining or rejecting it after divorce also remains a matter of individual preference.

Women still tend to be in charge of household chores, although a trend towards more involvement of men and boys in housekeeping has emerged. Society regards bearing a child a completely personal choice, and affords no stigma to a woman choosing to have or not to have a child.

In the event of a divorce, partners divide property equally, and if the mother retains custody of the children, laws oblige the father to provide a child support allowance. Despite equal rights to custody of children, courts often deem mothers custodians of infant children.

Health

Women have equal access to all healthcare services, which include medical and nursing services, rehabilitation, dentistry, and ambulance services. Special features of the Icelandic health care system for women include special clinics for expectant mothers in which trained paramedical staff work to physically and emotionally prepare women for motherhood. Infant mortality, as low as 3.5 deaths per 1,000 live births, remains one of the lowest rates in the world, and an occasional perinatal death of a woman is linked to underlying organic diseases, rather than to improper medical services.

Women in Iceland, at liberty to make their own health care decisions, have easy access to birth control measures, and 35 percent of women 20 to 40 years of age use contraceptive pills or an IUD. The Birth Control Act of 1975 provides sex education and counseling, contraception, and sterilization to men and women alike.

Interesting Social Customs

Iceland maintains the highest rate of children born out of wedlock in Europe—64 percent, in 2004.

Women in Business

General View

Iceland's progressive society has gone further than most other countries in terms of creating *de facto* equality between men and women. Approximately 80 percent of

Icelandic women have occupations outside their homes, and an open system of government has helped women to take an active role in politics that has led to political successes and important legislative progress.

The major push for gender equality that started with a national women's strike in 1975 is now focused on reducing wage disparities, increasing women's representation in management, and increasing the time spent by men on household responsibilities.

Legal Rights

Icelandic women gained voting rights and eligibility to run for office in 1917. To strike a balance between family and work, Iceland has enacted substantial maternity, paternity, and parental leave legislation. These laws entitle each parent to take up to three months paternal or maternal leave plus another three months, which they can share between them as they wish.

Although Article 14 of their Constitution says that women and men should receive equal pay and terms for equal work, statistical reports indicate that women on an average earn only 64 percent of a man's wages. This disparity is only 12 percent in the public sector.

Women in Professions

Women are dominant in education and healthcare employment and are roughly at par with men in other service industries. There are more women in the professions, as well. Men dominate employment in agriculture, manufacturing, transportation, and fishing (but not fish processing). Men are also twice as likely to be senior managers, but the fact that women are graduating from university and graduate schools at twice the rate of men bodes well for their eventual ability to achieve parity with men in management roles.

The victory of Vigdis Finnbogadóttir in the 1980 elections as the world's first elected female head of state has inspired Icelandic efforts to reduce inequality between the sexes. There are, however, few prominent examples of successful Icelandic businesswomen. Svafa Grönfeldt, an executive at Actavis, is one such example. The prolific musician Björk is Iceland's best known woman and certainly a very successful one.

Women are not barred from any professions in Iceland and there are no dress restrictions for Icelandic women. Women dress in typical Northern European clothing.

While both parents often take classes on child-rearing and parenting, women are still primarily responsible for taking care of children. Children of working parents are left at day-care centers from an early age. Working women also get domestic help from young girls who have experience in childcare. Parents can also avail themselves of childcare facilities run by the government.

Women as Business Owners

The government set up service centers to give guidance and encouragement to women entrepreneurs, and the past decade has seen an exponential increase in the number of women-owned businesses. Typically, women own businesses in the fashion industry and home-based and small-scale service industries.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Icelanders are comfortable with visiting businesswomen. Call your Icelandic counterparts by their first names, since using the last name is considered impolite. Foreign businesswomen should dress elegantly and modestly with minimum accessories (remember that your wardrobe should be warm as well). Neatness and cleanliness are a must.

Men will accept a foreign businesswoman's invitation to a dinner but normally will bring their wives along. While the younger generation has no problem with women paying, an older male Icelandic may insist on paying.

India

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

India, an extremely diverse country with innumerable linguistic, ethnic, and religious groups, presents the position and perception of Indian women among these groups in a very complex manner. Generally speaking, however, participation of Indian women in all spheres of society has seen a tremendous increase since the liberalization of the economy. Although society looked upon women primarily as wives and mothers (and still does in many cases), change is sweeping across the Indian social landscape, especially in urban areas, and society sees a large and increasing number of women in terms of what they do, rather than in terms of the family, class, caste, or religion to which they happen to belong.

India remains a strongly patriarchal and male-dominated society. Manu, the semi-mythical law-giver of the Hindus, had the following to say about women in his *Manusmriti* (Laws of Manu): "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence."

Paradoxically, Indian mythos and culture has also exalted woman as the "feminine divine" and has worshipped her from time immemorial in various ways—as *Lakshmi* (goddess of wealth), *Saraswati* (goddess of learning, music, and poetry), as *Kali* (goddess of death and destruction), and as *Sakthi* and *Maya* (primal force and cosmic illusion, respectively).

However much India exalts women in myth and imagination, in real life they have experienced abasement in equal measure. Various forms of domestic violence against women in India continue to be a major problem, with statistics indicating that one in every five married women suffers from abuse. An extreme form of abuse that continues to this day, for example, is the practice of "dowry-deaths"—the murders of newly-married women, disguised as suicides or accidental deaths. The woman's inability to bring in additional dowry seals her fate.

As these rare practices wane, however, an increasing number of educated women play major roles in decision-making at home and receive the necessary freedom to pursue careers and participate in other arenas of public life.

Social and economic factors, along with the caste system, play a major role in determining the position of Indian women. The position of women belonging to the upper social and economic strata of society tends to be on par with the men. Very visible, they represent the new face of the "modern" Indian woman. On the other hand, traditional male-dominated attitudes govern women from the lower classes, limiting their freedom and making them dependent on the men for all their needs.

The position of Indian women has been undergoing change for a long time, with the pace of that change increasing dramatically during recent times. The government has initiated a number of laws and measures to protect women's rights and encourage their participation in public life. This change has been more visible in the

urban regions as compared to the rural areas. Traditional practices that were highly damaging to women, such as child marriage, temple prostitution and *Sati* (the practice of burning a widow alive on her husband's funeral pyre), have been all but completely eliminated.

In Parliament, women hold 46 of the 552 seats in the *Lok Sabha*, the Lower House, and 28 of the 242 seats in the *Rajya Sabha*, the Upper House. This translates to a share of 8.3 and 11.6 percent, respectively. Seven of the 78 ministers in the central government are women (8.9 percent). One of the Supreme Court's 25 judges, and 25 of the 514 High Court judges, are also women. An ongoing movement works to reserve for women 30 percent of seats in Parliament and state legislatures.

Despite the low number of women legislators, many prominent examples of able and strong women who have displayed their talents in the political arena continue to emerge. None is more famous than former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who was assassinated in 1984. Not only did she prove a very powerful Prime Minister, but she, as leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, championed the cause of developing countries. In the words of one of her critics, she "bestrode the Indian political scene like a Colossus."

The Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, wife of the slain former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and leader of the ruling Congress party, has become the most powerful woman in India in the early 21st century. In the powerful Southern state of Tamil Nadu, former movie star and two-time chief minister, J. Jayalalitha, stamped her indelible mark on the state's politics.

In the medical field, women comprise almost the entire Indian nursing workforce. The population of India's trained female doctors, surgeons, scientists, and professors exceeds even that of the United States. The business sector has seen a steady growth in the number of women entrepreneurs, and current estimates indicate that women comprise 10 percent of all entrepreneurs in India.

Rural Indian women work extensively in the fields and constitute a large portion of the workforce in the agricultural sector. Access to various educational and employment opportunities and to facilities providing health care remain limited. Society subjects many rural women to violence and discriminatory practices. This remains especially true in the case of *Dalit* women (formally known as "untouchables") in several states of India, who, by force, suffer through some of the worst indignities, humiliations, and sundry other oppressions their upper-caste masters regularly mete out to them. Urban women, educated and "modern" in attitudes and dress, make up a large part of the workforce in the country's various industrialized sectors. The gap between urban and rural women in India remains quite large.

India serves as home to an amazing number of ethnic groups, making it one of the most heterogeneous countries in the world. The position of women in various ethnic sub-cultures varies widely. The indigenous tribal people live lives of chronic poverty and lack access to even the most basic of amenities. On the other hand, certain ethnic tribal groups in the North-Eastern region of India, like the *Khasis* of Meghalaya for example, live in matriarchal societies where women serve as heads of the household. Matriarchy

also remains prevalent among the relatively affluent Nair community of the state of Kerala, where women (and their brothers) wield most of the power.

Indian women generally dress conservatively, but colorfully, in *saris*, *churidars* (a three-piece dress with pajamas, knee-length top, and shawl), and forms of regional dress. In urban areas, fashion-conscious women wear anything from Western to “modified Indian” to a fusion of both Western and Indian styles.

Legal Rights

Indian women have the same legal rights as men in all respects. India granted women the right to vote in 1950. Women can also drive cars and have rights to own and inherit property. Civil law as well as various religious laws pertaining to religious communities, however, govern inheritance matters: Hindu Joint Family laws, *Sharia* laws, and Christian marriage and inheritance laws. The Indian constitution accepts only the *Sharia* laws on marriage and inheritance, for Muslims.

Certain discriminatory-to-women provisions of the Christian inheritance laws have been successfully challenged in the Supreme Court of India by an intrepid woman, Mary Roy. Women have the right to initiate divorce. They also have the right to lay claim to custody of the children. For Muslim women, *Sharia* laws regarding divorce apply. Abortion, almost totally legal in India, can be resorted to even for instances like contraceptive failure. Laws require a second medical opinion for abortions conducted during the 12th to 20th week of pregnancy. Although abortion remains legally unavailable on request, women easily circumvent this, and authorities rarely prosecute infringements.

Indian women, faced with patriarchal prejudices, male chauvinism, and religious orthodoxy, have a powerful and reliable ally to safeguard their interests: the highly progressive Indian Judiciary.

Education

India's laws guarantee women equal access to all educational facilities in the country. Literacy for Indian women rates at about 66 percent, compared to 76 percent for the men. This statistic, however, hides enormous disparities in the levels of women's literacy in various parts of the country. For example, the state of Mizoram has a female literacy rate of 95 percent while Bihar, India's poorest state, records an approximate 34 percent literacy rate.

A majority of Indian girls complete their primary schooling. In the urban areas, most of them go on to complete their higher education as well. Schools in India generally follow the coeducational system, with boys and girls sharing the same classroom space, but many single-sex educational institutions also exist. Educated women have equal access to job opportunities. Although men dominate the higher levels of management, women are increasingly establishing a presence at top, decision-making levels of companies.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages, fixed by parents, relatives, friends or professional matchmakers, typify the norm in most parts of India except for the North-Eastern states. Although many urban youth these days increasingly choose their spouses, many Indian women and men (even highly educated ones) remain wary of letting go of the arranged system of marriage.

Men and women in urban areas enjoy dating, with women meeting men at educational institutions and at social events such as weddings and festivals. Dating usually begins during the late teens. Intimacy among friends of the same sex and their open displays of affection (like holding hands, hugging, and putting arms around each other), likely mistaken for homosexuality by foreigners, have no such connotation. Indeed, such displays constitute an integral part of the dynamic of friendship in India.

The legal age for marriage in India is 18 for women and 21 for men. However, child marriages still occur in certain poor, least-developed states of India. The mean marrying age of Indian women is about 17 years for rural women, and in the early 20s for urban women.

Women in India take care of the household, with urban wives playing major roles in decision-making. An increasing number of women are beginning to lead households in the absence of the men. Women also have the right to hold assets separately from their husbands although taking their husband's names after marriage. In the event of a divorce, most women revert back to their maiden names.

In the event of a divorce, various religious laws, as well as civil laws, govern maintenance and alimony laws. Women, however, may claim support, and the men must provide it until a woman remarries. Civil laws, as well as Muslim personal laws (in the case of Muslims), apply regarding granting custody of children. Although women have the right to claim custody of the children, fathers also have equal rights to custody of minor children.

Childless women in India, especially those from rural areas, suffer heavy stigmas and face social scorn. In some areas, the number of children (especially male children) determines a woman's social status. Polygamy remains legally and socially unacceptable in most parts of India. However, Islamic laws allow Indian Muslims to have up to four wives.

Health

India guarantees women equal rights in accessing healthcare and medical facilities. However, rural women in many parts of India still have limited access to health care. As of 2005, maternal mortality rates for Indian women stood at 407 deaths per 100,000 live births, the third highest in the world. Infant mortality rates for the same year stood at 62 fatalities per 1,000 live births. Women make most healthcare decisions only after consultation with their families, and often after obtaining the permission of their husbands. Urban women, however, may have more choices and decision-making power.

Indian women have easy access to birth control measures, although contraceptive usage remains quite low. Studies indicate that less than half of India's married couples use any form of birth control, with almost two-thirds of women opting for female sterilization.

Interesting Social Customs

Rural Indian girls who attain puberty are confined to their homes for a month, during which time families prohibit them from leaving the house or visiting temples. According to Hindu customs, women must not visit temples and other places of Hindu religious worship during their menstrual cycles. Indian brides almost always decorate their hands with intricate designs using *henna* or

mehandi, a reddish-colored paste made from the leaves of the *mehandi* plant.

Women in Business

General View

An increasing number of women are making their presence felt in India's vibrant economy as entrepreneurs and professionals. Most of these women, however, hail from India's urban and semi-urban areas. Rural women have to be content with tending the fields and contributing to the family's income by running micro or small-sized businesses. Studies indicate that many women make significant contributions to their family's businesses in the form of unpaid labor, but their efforts are rarely recognized.

Traditionally, Indian women were expected to stay at home and take care of the family, thereby severely limiting their participation in the economic and business sectors. Since independence, government initiatives and programs, along with strident activism by innumerable women's NGOs, have been trying to break down the male-centric barriers to Indian women's empowerment, with considerable success. The economic liberalization in the early 1990s, along with the profound changes in society due to globalization, has unleashed the creativity and potential of Indian women. A large and increasing number of middle- and upper-class women with higher education and English language skills have blazed a shining trail through the Indian economy. The innumerable IT firms, BPOs (business process outsourcing companies), and call centers (staffed and even run by educated English-speaking women) dotting the Indian landscape are resounding testimony to Indian women's social and economic empowerment.

Legal Rights

Indian women enjoy equal legal rights as the men in all spheres: social, political, and economic. They were granted the right to vote in 1950 and can own and inherit businesses as well as property. Inheritance matters, however, are governed by the civil law as well as various religious laws pertaining to religious communities: Hindu Joint Family laws, *Sharia* laws, and Christian marriage and inheritance laws. The Indian constitution accepts only the *Sharia* laws on marriage and inheritance for Muslims. Certain provisions of the Christian inheritance laws discriminatory to women have been successfully challenged in the Supreme Court of India.

Women are assured equal pay as men for equal work, according to laws guaranteeing gender equality; however, pay discrepancies do exist in India, mostly in the unorganized sector and in small-sized enterprises. Almost all large private and public sector companies and the civil service provide equal pay for both sexes. Indian women, faced with patriarchal prejudices, male chauvinism, and religious orthodoxy, have a powerful and reliable ally to safeguard their interests: the highly progressive Indian Judiciary.

Women in Professions

In terms of sheer numbers, most Indian women participate in the agricultural and industrial sectors. The enormous size of the Indian economy, however, offers many opportunities in a wide variety of careers, and

women are participating in almost all of these in greater and greater numbers.

Women occupy a substantial portion of the teaching and nursing workforce. Indian women are also doctors, accountants, lawyers, and judges (in the lower as well as the higher judiciary). Many women also hold administrative positions in various public and private sector companies. Women are even making their presence felt in the Army and the Air Force as officers and pilots. A large number of women work in the Indian film industry (the largest in the world) and in television as actors, directors, writers, singers, dancers, composers, musicians, editors, and costume designers. Last and far from least, Indian women form a large and increasing part of the vibrant and growing software development and information technology (IT) industry.

There are many female heads of companies in India, with an increasing number getting appointed to high-level positions in the public and private sectors. Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, the chairman and managing director of biotechnology company Biocon, is arguably the most famous Indian businesswoman, besides being the richest. Some other famous Indian businesswomen include: Shahnaz Hussain, the CEO of Shahnaz Herbals; Naina Lal Kidwai, the deputy CEO of HSBC; and Lalita D. Gupte, the joint managing director of ICICI Bank.

Increasing economic liberalization and industrialization has seen a rise in the participation of women in the business sector. The outlook for Indian women in business is bright, and the trend is set to continue with the government as well as private financial institutions paying special attention to the needs of female businesswomen. Indian women are not barred from any profession, although certain sectors like mining are heavily male-dominated. Women still cannot work in combat roles in the armed forces, but this is set to change.

No dress code restrictions prevent women from taking up certain jobs, though most Indian women dress conservatively. Urban women, however, follow the latest Western fashion or go for a fusion of Indian and Western in their dressing.

If the mother works, the extended family such as grandparents, relatives, and older siblings assume childcare. State-sponsored childcare is available in India, though the facilities are by and large inadequate and poorly maintained.

Women as Business Owners

According to 2005 estimates, about 10 percent of all entrepreneurs in India were women. The number is set to grow and possibly double in the next few years, as an increasing number of women start their own businesses. Indian businesswomen usually focus on the clothing, food products, healthcare, gifts, household goods, beauty care, cosmetics, publishing, film and television production (including animation), tailoring, baby products, fashion designing, and, most importantly, the IT sector.

Mention should be made here of the women belonging to the Indian Diaspora, also known as NRIs (Non-Resident Indians), in many regions of the world like North America, Europe, Middle East, Africa, and Asia-Pacific, whose contributions toward the Indian economy in terms of foreign currency remittances and investments are huge and growing.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

While Western women may face difficulties doing business in rural regions, they will be gladly accepted by urban businesspeople, who are very cosmopolitan in their outlook and often have relatives living abroad. Not everybody will feel comfortable doing business with women, however, since women in business are a relatively recent phenomenon in India; so it may require an extra bit of effort from businesswomen to get men from the older generation or from socially conservative backgrounds to be more at ease.

It is worth remembering that an Indian who says, "I will try" is actually saying, "no" in a polite way. Foreign

businesswomen can take Indian businessmen for lunch without any embarrassment or awkwardness. Men do not usually shake hands or touch women in public. However, Westernized men and women from India may shake hands upon meeting.

Attire

Indians do not wear shoes inside the home. Although the styles of dress for urban Indian women are increasingly influenced by Western fashions and can be quite modern and trendy, visiting businesswomen should avoid revealing clothing.

Indonesia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Indonesian women have come a long way in their majority Islamic and male-dominated society. Although gender inequality is still significant, the dynamics of female participation in the economy are changing. Women have always contributed to the economy, but only at lower levels as unpaid workers in the home or in low-paid jobs. Now they hold more positions in the professions, business, and government.

Men's share of the total earned income is still 62 percent versus women's 38 percent, but those numbers are skewed by the absence of women's income from the informal economy (where they are disproportionately represented) and from subsistence farming. Poorer women have always been very economically active since their contributions to their family's finances are essential to their collective survival.

Indonesia is basically a patriarchal society, where women are expected to play traditional subordinate roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. For this reason, they face many problems like gender discrimination in education and employment, sexual harassment, domestic violence, polygamy, and exploitation by their own male family members.

Women hold around 11.3 percent of the seats in the Parliament and represent 11 percent of government ministers. Four out of 36 cabinet members are women, while the DPR (House of Representatives) and DPD (House of Regional Representatives) had 61 and 44 women members respectively. Thirty percent of all political party nominations are required to be reserved for women. They are also represented at local government levels, occupying a couple of District Chief positions. In professions like law and medicine, women are relatively well-represented. Over 16 percent of judges, 23 percent of State Administrative Court judges, and 15 percent of the Supreme Court's Supreme Judges are women. Estimates show that women run around 60 percent of all micro, small, and medium enterprises.

Urban women, especially educated and employed ones, are playing more important roles than their rural counterparts for whom education is still a luxury. Many of

those pursuing higher education limit themselves to "feminine" courses in the sciences and humanities that reduce their chances of competing for better jobs.

Among ethnic groups, the *Betawi* women are much backward socially and economically. There are, however some matriarchal communities like the *Minangkabau* in Sumatra and West Timor where women are in charge of the household and men take their wife's surnames.

Long skirts with full-sleeved blouses are considered to be appropriate dress for working women. Jeans and other western casual clothing are allowed if worn modestly.

Legal Rights

Indonesian women have equal rights with men in many areas. They have had the right to vote since 1945 and were granted equal inheritance rights in 1960. Women in Indonesia also have many other legal protections relating to marriage, divorce, property, inheritance, education, and employment. However, customary laws are biased against women and often take precedence over constitutional law. Discriminatory customary practices in relation to inheritance, marriage, divorce, and the custody of children are, however, losing their ground due to better implementation of new, progressive legislation. Women can now initiate divorce proceedings and may even receive custody of the children. They, however, have limited reproductive rights, especially regarding abortion, which is allowed only to save the woman's life.

Education

Indonesian women lag far behind men in access to education. In 2003, women represented 68 percent of illiterate people in Indonesia (83.4% literacy for women compared to 92.5% for men), and, in 2000, boys outnumbered girls at the elementary school level. A national survey conducted in 2000 showed that only about 12.8 percent of girls finished high school. This is partly due to traditional practices in regions like the *kawin piara* in Pulau Buru, where girls are married off when they are only eight years old.

Nevertheless, there is an increase in the number of women pursuing higher education, especially in the urban areas and among the middle and upper middle classes. Educated women are eligible to take up a career of their

choice. However, there is some discrimination against women in recruitment, pay, and promotions.

Indonesian schools and colleges are generally co-educational, although boys and girls are segregated in certain areas.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Muslims generally sign a pre-marital contract, which specifies the bride price, the rights of the partners, and promises made by the groom. Arranged marriages are common in many communities and rural areas, although modern urban youth are increasingly taking to Western-style dating and choosing their own life partners.

Courtships remain a family issue, where elders in the family sign a courtship agreement and also exchange gifts during a formal courtship ceremony. A girl usually seeks her family's approval before going out on a date. The minimum marriageable age with legal consent is 16 years for women. The average age at first marriage for Indonesian women is 21.6 years. Marriages are generally monogamous, and polygamy is rarely practiced in Indonesia, although Muslim customary laws allow it. Marriages between cousins are common in some clans.

Women need not legally change their surname after marriage, although many women do. They have equal rights and responsibilities in the house and remain in charge of household matters along with their husbands' and children's welfare.

Women can initiate divorces both under the civil as well as Islamic family court system. They are also eligible for alimony after divorce and get to keep the share of the property that they previously owned before marriage. Joint property obtained during marriage is divided equally or as per the marriage agreement. Women, however, have to abstain from remarriage for a certain period of time.

The courts generally decide about custody of the children in case of dispute. Divorce and remarriage are more common among the Javanese, while the *Batak* and some other groups do not accept divorce at all. The latter also follow the *levirate* tradition where widows are made to marry brothers or cousins of their deceased husbands. Women can own and manage assets independently of their husbands.

Health

Women in Indonesia have reasonable access to healthcare facilities – both public and private. Civil servants and poor people are offered services like health cards, free contraceptives, and free examinations during pregnancy. Community healthcare centers, sub-centers, and even mobile centers offer healthcare services. The percentage of births attended by healthcare professionals was around 62 percent in 1998.

The infant mortality rate is 34 births per 1,000 live births. Maternal mortality is estimated to be high, at 307 per 100,000 births, because of the country's abortion policies. Although women can make their own healthcare decisions, husbands have a say regarding the number of children. Family planning is widely practiced, with a contraceptive use rate of around 66 percent, although Islamic conservatives sometimes interpret it as an impingement on women's reproductive rights.

Interesting Social Customs

Men and women do not make even minimal physical contact in public. Shaking hands is appropriate, but only when women initiate it. Divorced women should wait for a particular period of time before remarrying. This does not apply to men.

Women in Business

General View

Indonesian women have become more economically independent over the last few years. The number of women pursuing higher education and a good career path has increased significantly. Career women are becoming more socially acceptable. Increasing numbers of women are assuming important roles in the workplace or becoming entrepreneurs who provide employment to several other people.

Though women in businesses are gaining acceptance, they face challenges in terms of scale of business. Women own and manage more than half of all micro, small, and medium enterprises in Indonesia. They also represent an estimated 40 percent of the total labor force.

Legal Rights

Women in Indonesia were granted the right to vote in 1945. They can legally engage in any economic and social activity like trading, owning, and managing property, entering into business contracts, and so on. They are entitled to employment in all jobs in all sectors as business owners or partners. They can inherit equally with men in spite of customary Islamic inheritance laws, which are unfavorable to women. Because there are both patrilineal and matrilineal societies in Indonesia, rules concerning property rights, succession, inheritance, marriage, and divorce vary from region to region. Inheritance may also depend on the kind of property – inherited or acquired, communal or individual.

Women's average income is around 68 percent of men's income. There is some discrimination by law, as in the case of head-of-household allowance, which is given only to the husband if both the husband and wife are employed in a government agency.

Women in Professions

Substantial differences exist in the kinds of occupations for men and women. Many women are employed in jobs as factory workers or day laborers with low pay and no benefits. Women also tend to work in specific sectors like sales, services, and agriculture. Even in these fields, the number of high-level female managers or administrators remains small compared to the number of women who work. Women also favor teaching, nursing, and government employment.

Well-known female executives include: Siti Hartati Tjakra Murdaya, who runs CCM/Berca group of companies; Dr. Ati Srikajati Saleh, senior executive of PT ULTRAJAYA milk processing company and Deputy Director of PT DADA a dairy farmers co-operative company; and, Hestia Utomo, Managing Director, Kobe Lyna Industries.

A study done at the beginning of the century showed that growth rate of female-owned businesses was around 9 percent, compared to 23 percent for male-owned businesses. The proportion of female-owned businesses is higher in sectors like food processing, trade, services,

and textiles/garments. Female-owned businesses had the best growth rates in the textiles/garments sector. However, just 11.6 percent of the women-owned enterprises had growth rates of over 30 percent, while 21.8 percent of male-owned businesses grew over 30 percent. Over 69 percent of female-owned businesses had less than 10 percent growth rates.

Women are prohibited from working underground in mines or pits except for some non-manual work. They may not be employed in any job that threatens their safety, health, or morality. Indonesian law also stipulates that a woman's work must not interfere with her role as a mother and homemaker. Women are required to dress modestly and conservatively in the workplace. Long dresses or skirts with long-sleeved blouses are commonly worn. Headscarves are compulsory for Muslim women in some areas of the country, while in other areas many women simply choose to wear headscarves.

Working women depend upon family members or paid helpers to take care of young children. Although state-sponsored childcare is not available, the government is encouraging companies to have in-house childcare services to help working mothers.

Women as Business Owners

There have been a few initiatives to induce more women, especially those from lower socio-economic classes, to take up entrepreneurship. As things stand, women own about 60 percent of the micro-, small-, and medium-scale enterprises, but the Indonesian Women's Business Association, which has around 16,000 members, estimates that 85 percent of its member organizations are in the micro and small-scale categories.

Women do own businesses in a variety of sectors, but some, like the production of herbal cosmetics, are considered purely women's work.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Given the number of female business owners, heads of businesses, and high government officials in Indonesia, most people are used to dealing with women in positions of authority, and foreign businesswomen should not encounter any particular problems.

Foreign women should take extra care to dress modestly. It is up to a woman, when introduced to a man, to initiate a handshake. Greetings should be formal and elaborate, with enquiries about private lives and family. Greetings and small talk are both necessary steps to establishing a good relationship, so consider it important not to appear impatient or confrontational.

Iran

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditional Iranian society has always considered women inferior to men. During the Pahlavi regime, women were encouraged to participate in all sectors of society. The Islamic revolution of the late 1970s turned the clock back for women and the strictest version of the Islamic *Sharia* laws were imposed on them, depriving them of most of the rights and freedoms they had enjoyed under the Shah of Iran.

Iran is typically a patriarchal society in which women require the consent of their husbands to work outside the home or travel abroad. The conservative Islamic government of Iran insists on gender segregation in all areas. The state strictly enforces the dress code of women, and even a minor deviation from the dress code can result in disciplinary action by the police. Sex segregation is evident in all parts of Iran where even elevators, buses, and pedestrian walkways are sex segregated.

Iran has witnessed a dramatic change in the status of women after the revolution in 1979. In the beginning, women were simply stripped of all their rights except those granted them by the *Sharia*. During the reforms of the late 1980s and 1990s, they gained a measure of freedom and opportunity and began to enter various fields of economic and social activity. After the initial flush of freedom and democracy, retrograde steps have been introduced affecting women, like the mandatory use of *hijab* (veils) in public, the prohibition on women holding

high managerial posts or judgeships, and the deprivation of various women's rights under family law. Although women have participated in politics since the 1950s, they have a very low representation in the Parliament. They constituted only four percent of the seats in the lower house in 2005.

Iran has more female doctors and dentists than male doctors, although the prevalent discrimination offers them only a substandard medical education. Iranian women constitute nearly 35 percent of the total workforce, which is higher than the percentage of working women in other Muslim countries in the Middle East. Rural women's substantial presence in productive activities has contributed much to the economy of the country, but rural women have less access to education, health care, and other facilities than their urban counterparts.

Women in Kurdish regions of Iran suffer from domestic violence, social injustice, and discrimination resulting in a high occurrence of self-immolation in this area. The 25,000 Jews of Iran are allowed to dress or celebrate according to their traditions, but must adhere to Muslim dress code in public places and universities.

Iranian women dress conservatively and wear a *chador*, a semicircular piece of dark cloth that is wrapped skillfully around the body and head, and gathered at the chin.

Legal Rights

The Iranian Constitution guarantees women political, economic, social, and cultural rights, within the limitations of Islamic laws. Iranian women have the right to vote (since 1963) and to drive. Women inherit only half of the

husbands' estate in the absence of an heir and one-eighth when there are children. Abortion is illegal, but the penal code of 1991 reduced the punishment for abortions. A woman can undergo abortion with the endorsement of a panel of professionals if the pregnancy endangers her life.

Generally, Iranian women cannot initiate divorces unless they have a clause in the marriage contract allowing it. According to Islamic laws, divorced men receive the custody of boys over three years of age and of girls aged seven years or more. Usually divorced women relinquish their bride money in exchange for custody of their children.

Education

Recently, Iranian women have received equal access to education, and the large number of women entering universities reflects the progress of women in education. However, they still lag behind men in literacy levels: women have a literacy rate of 73 percent compared to 85.6 percent for men. Enrollment of Iranian women in medical institutions exceeds that of men. The government has initiated a quota system for men because the society feels the high educational levels of women will threaten the traditional male-dominated values and beliefs.

Iran has separate schools for girls with tall walls and painted windows so that nobody can see girls from the outside. Despite their high qualifications, women do not have equal job opportunities, and nearly 90 percent of educated women are unemployed or underemployed due to societal prejudices.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, parents arrange the marriages of their children. Mothers play an important role in the spouse selection process. Iran's Islamic culture condemns dating practices, and unmarried men and women cannot sit together or talk in public transportation and other places.

Iranian women can get married once they reach puberty, but, with official sanction, pre-pubescent girls can be married as young as nine years old. The average age at which Iranian women marry is 21 years. As an Islamic nation, Iran allows polygamy with up to four wives per man. Women in polygamous marriages can take legal action if the husband does not treat them equally.

A curious form of Iranian marriage, called "temporary marriage," should be mentioned here. Confronted with the problem of many women (including the increasing number of runaway girls) turning to prostitution, the authorities instituted the pretense of temporary marriages where a man can "marry" a girl and "divorce" her a couple of hours later after consummating the "marriage."

Women become part of their husband's households after marriage, but they can hold assets separate from their husbands and also keep their maiden names. Typically, Iranian women take responsibility of all domestic chores and leave decision-making to husbands. Iranians consider fertility as a blessing, so childless women face a stigma and such situations often lead to divorce or polygamy. Upon divorce, men receive the custody of boys over three years and girls over seven years. A divorced woman usually receives a specified amount written in the marriage contract, but she often gives up the bride price in exchange for full custody of children. Divorced women have the legal right to remarry. Iranian women also have the legal right to hold assets separate from their husbands.

Health

Iranian women have equal access to healthcare services. Since the 1990s, the healthcare system in Iran has developed and improved a lot, although rural women face difficulties in accessing good medical treatment. Unsafe abortions undergone by married women have led to an increase in the maternal mortality rate. Infant mortality hovers at 40 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Women make healthcare decisions jointly with their husbands or parents. Iran incorporated family planning programs in primary healthcare and required both men and women to take a class on modern contraception before receiving a marriage license, so women can freely access contraceptives without any social impediments. Recent hard-line Islamic policies, however, oppose family planning and population-control practices.

Interesting Social Customs

Iranians consider a downward gaze as a symbol of respect. Men avoid eye contact with women because it may be perceived in a wrong way.

Women in Business

General View

The traditional attitudes of Iranian society continue to restrict women's participation in economic activities. Gender discrimination in education has contributed to women's involvement in lower or middle level occupations. A large majority of Iranian women who work have jobs in the public sector.

In the past two decades, Iranian women have made little progress, though there has been some increase in women working in male-dominated sectors like information technology and manufacturing. However, the current Iranian government is conservative, and many predict that the number of working women will diminish rather than increase in the near future.

Legal Rights

The Iranian constitution guarantees women equal rights with men in many areas of social, economic, and political life. Iranian women won the right to vote and the right to stand for elections in 1963. However, Iran is an Islamic country, and the *Sharia* laws govern day-to-day rights of Iranian women. According to the *Sharia*, a woman inherits only half of her husband's assets in the absence of heirs, and one-eighth when the couple has children. Though a bill allowing widows to inherit full property in absence of any other heirs was passed, the law was never implemented because of preexisting social conventions. Legally, women are entitled to equal pay for equal work, but, on average, Iranian women earn only 46 percent of what men earn.

Women in Professions

Carpet weaving and agriculture are traditional women's jobs. Iranian women have more recently worked in teaching, research, medicine, nursing, and administration. Unskilled jobs such electronics assembly, packaging drugs and cosmetics, food processing, and other factory work have also been opened to women.

Iranian women rarely hold high managerial posts, and some reports rank Iran 97 out of 102 countries in terms of numbers of female managers. Women made up only 2.8 percent of public sector managers from 1966 to 1996. Today, change has been slight—the number of female public sector managers has increased, but only to about 5 percent.

There are some individual success stories. Mahvash Nikpour has served as president, managing director, and chairman of Koole Bar International Transport, Forwarding and Shipping Co., the head of the Council of Business Women, and deputy for Iranian Business Women Entrepreneurs at the International Forum Sharjah, U.A.E. She also worked with the Tehran and Iran Chambers of Commerce, Industries and Mines to establish ties between Iran and Armenia, Australia, China, and Iraq.

Mahvash Tayarani Babai is a majority owner and managing director of Nuian Baspar Eng. Co., which sells specialty chemicals and catalysts. She is also chairman of Exir (Chemicals) Ltd., which deals with chemical and equipment procurement services. She serves as a member of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines; the Irano British Chamber of Commerce (IBCCIM); the Irano German Chamber of Commerce; and on the IBCCIM investment promotion committee.

Progress remains slow. Successful women and government initiatives have offered some training, credit, and other facilities to women to help them overcome the challenges before them.

There are a number of limitations on the type of work Iranian women can do. Women may serve in the Iranian military only as medical or health personnel. Iranian labor codes prohibit the employment of women in “arduous work or work which is harmful to health.” They may not do night shift work. Women are also barred from serving as judges, except for consultant and research judges, who have no power to pass judgment. A 2005 edict states that women may not work as restaurant managers, and another dictates that female civil servants at the Culture Ministry and women journalists working for the state newspaper and news agency must leave work by 6:00 pm, potentially curtailing their productivity. A woman's husband also has the legal right to prevent her from working in any profession he deems inappropriate.

Iranian women dress conservatively and traditionally wear the *chador*, a semicircular piece of dark cloth that is wrapped and secured around the body and head. Iranian women are legally required to wear a headscarf that covers all their hair and a loose coat in public. Even a small deficiency in outer clothes, such as a coat that is too tight or does not reach below the knees, can lead to arrest. Any work that can't be done within the confines of the regulation covering is off limits to women. This includes any physical work done outdoors and most jobs in public entertainment. However, women are permitted to work in television and film as long as they dress modestly.

Working mothers usually get childcare help from extended family members or domestic servants. Each state organization also has daycare centers run privately under the regulation of the state welfare organization.

Women as Business Owners

Very few women own businesses in Iran. Some jobs, however, allow women to work independently. In the rural areas of Iran, women sometimes operate businesses in the traditional field of carpet-weaving. They also work in

animal husbandry (cows, sheep and goats), bee-keeping, and silkworm cultivation. In cities, they start businesses such as publishing companies, restaurants, bakeries, private medical offices, tailor shops, and hair salons. Women can sometimes work independently as artists, movie directors, and graphic designers.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

In conservative Iran, foreign businesswomen can expect to experience some difficulties dealing with local businessmen. Foreign businesswomen should dress conservatively and wear clothes that cover their hands, legs, and hair. Meetings are formal but usually start with a small talk on general issues. It's important to lay the foundations for a good relationship at the initial meeting because Iranians prefer to do business with people they know well. Handshakes are the usual greeting, but a man will not shake hands with a woman unless she makes the initial gesture. Iranians tend to judge people by appearances, so dress well and stay in good hotels.

Iraq

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Many years of war and strife have had a tremendous impact on the socioeconomic status of Iraqi women. The two Gulf Wars have led to an increased domestic load on a majority of women, and accessing basic necessities such as food and medicines has become a time-consuming ordeal for them, leaving them little time to pursue other economic activities. A decline in female literacy and a corresponding decrease in women's employability, high birth rates, and a deterioration of the health status of women and children place additional burden on them, thus preventing them from pursuing employment. Public violence forced many women to close their businesses and even stop their education. The situation of the educated urban women was a shade better as they found employment in education and public administration.

Despite strong patriarchal influence in the Kurdish society, women's education is encouraged among this group. Kurdish women can choose whether or not to use a veil, and they face fewer restrictions than other Muslim women in pursuing jobs outside of their home.

Iraqi women have entered politics in a big way as is evident from the results of the 2005 national election in which they bagged 32 percent of the seats in the Transitional National Assembly. Efforts are underway to grant equal rights to women and to increase their representation in important sectors like the judiciary, state ministries, and local government. Few women enter professional fields like medicine and law or business. General income levels are lower in rural areas, and the rate of female employment in rural centers is nearly two times the rate of urban areas. In rural areas, uneducated women have a higher labor force participation rate, especially in agriculture.

Islamic radicalism and conservative political parties wield a lot of influence in Central and Southern Iraq, where many women have to conform to *Sharia* laws. Women who have previously worn western clothes are now required to wear the veil (*hijab* or the *abaya*), and those who don't are harassed and even assaulted.

Legal Rights

The Iraqi Constitution gives equal rights to women as long as they do not contradict the traditional *Sharia* laws. Iraqi women have the right to participate in public life including the right to vote and run for office. They also have the right to drive vehicles and own and inherit property. Iraqi abortion law allows women to have abortions to save the life of the woman or if the fetus has any disabilities.

Divorce by repudiation (the practice of men divorcing their wives by saying "*talaq*" three times in front of witnesses) is no longer allowed, and women can now initiate divorce and have the same rights as men regarding custody of their children.

Education

The Gulf Wars and the ensuing economic sanctions have had a negative impact on the country's once-progressive education system, and Iraq's literacy rate has declined to one of the lowest in the region, with a wider gender gap in rural areas. In 2003, around 68 percent of girls aged 6 to 11 were attending primary schools, compared to 82 percent of boys. Iraqis practice co-education, and no female-only schools exist (although male-only schools do).

Iraqi law grants gender equality in employment and education and prohibits pay discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. Women make up around 20 percent of the professional workforce and are concentrated in the sectors of education, manufacturing, public administration, and agriculture. They are also free to pursue employment in the police force or the army. Urban women with less than elementary school education are employed in wholesale and retail work.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditional arranged marriages have become less common, and a new law grants authority to the legal system to override the wishes of the father. Alliances between kin groups are more common than inter-ethnic marriages.

Western-style dating is not practiced in Iraq, but online dating is gaining popularity. In some cases, women are denied the right to choose their marriage partner and are subjected to violence or are even killed (known as "honor killings") if they oppose their families. The legal age for marriage is 18 years, below which it is necessary to obtain parental approval or court consent. The mean marriage age for Iraqi women is 22 compared to 26 for men. Men are allowed to practice polygamy under the condition that they have the approval of the first wife and judicial consent.

Iraqi women have equal rights to own and administer property. They can also access credit facilities and receive inheritance on equal footing with men. They are entitled to receive dowry and maintenance from their husbands. Iraqi Arab women do not take their husbands' name upon marriage.

Iraqi women can now initiate divorce proceedings in civil courts and men can no longer easily get rid of their wives simply by pronouncing "*talaq*" three times in front of witnesses. In case of divorce, women now have equal rights with men to custody of children. However, childlessness carries a stigma with serious social and emotional consequences.

Health

The vast majority of Iraqi women lack adequate healthcare services, and maternal mortality rate has tripled in the post-war period. Women have to obtain the permission of their husband or a male relative before receiving any kind of health care. Only half the women population receives prenatal care. Women can terminate pregnancies with the consent of the husband. Family planning services have now become freely available to all Iraqi women.

Interesting Social Customs

Islamic radicalism has revived the *Shia* Islamic practice of *mut'a* or "pleasure marriage," a 1,400-year-old tradition of marriage between an unmarried woman and a man (married or otherwise) that may last a few minutes or hours. Many single women are entering into such alliances with their eyes open, as they see it as a reprieve for their economic problems (read "prostitution"). Women who have no children are kept away from birth celebrations out of a feeling that their presence may bring harm to the newborn.

Women in Business

General View

War and occupation have had a serious impact on women in Iraq. They struggle every day to study, work, and/or raise their families in the middle of violence, poverty, and the near total collapse of vital infrastructure that often leaves them without basic necessities in terms of nutrition, healthcare, security, and education. Sectarian violence, the rising power of Islamic fundamentalist groups, the problems arising out of the U.S. occupation (including intrusive searches of Iraqi homes) have all negatively impacted women's rights and made living in Iraq very difficult for them.

Women and girls have limited access to jobs and education, and the constant violence restricts many women and children, especially girls, to their homes. Few children brave the streets to attend school, and illiteracy is on the rise. Despite a constitutional provision for free education at all levels, only primary school education is mandatory.

According to United Nations/World Bank assessment, women represent more than half of Iraq's population but constitute only a quarter of the formal work force. Most of the women in the formal sector are employed as middle-level professionals in the public and service sectors and, in rural areas, as agricultural workers. In the informal sector, a vast majority of the women work under difficult conditions in marginized low-paying economic activities.

Women in Northern Iraq are better off than their peers in Central and Southern Iraq. Despite the pervasive male-dominated culture and a rural-urban divide, they still have made progress in comparison to their previous status. In the pre-war time, the primarily Kurdish north had the lowest levels of education for women and girls. However, girls in the north now have more security and easy access to schooling, as a result of which their enrollment rates in elementary and intermediate school is showing a marked increase as compared to the rates in Central and Southern Iraq.

Women's centers have been opened in the northern region, and Kurdish women have held positions in the interim Iraqi governments and put up stiff resistance against the decision of the Iraqi Governing Council to replace secular family laws by *Sharia*.

Legal Rights

Iraqi women have the right to participate in public life, including the right to vote and to be elected to public office. They also have the right to own and inherit property and to initiate business. The current employment rate for women is almost twice as high in rural areas as it is in urban ones, but the general income of women is lower in rural areas.

Women in Professions

There has been a significant rise in the number of Iraqi firms offering employment to women, and nearly 63 percent of all firms now employ women. Older businesses employ women at the same rate as newer firms.

Prominent Iraqi businesswomen include: Huda Alazawi, a wealthy Baghdad businesswoman who is trying to revive her once-prosperous business of importing foreign cars and electrical goods; Hero Ibrahim Ahmed is a respected businesswoman and founder of the Kurdistan Women's Union; Sahar Murtdha is a software designer, the head of the Department of Research and Business Development at the General Systems Company in Baghdad, and the National Grants Manager for the transitional government.

Iraqi women are barred from serving in the police, army, border patrol, or other security agencies. In the post-war period, the advent of radicalism has forced many Iraqi women to wear the *hijab* (traditional Muslim head scarf), thus reintroducing this dress code 35 years after it had been abandoned.

Childcare is the responsibility of the mother and in extended family units, other female members provide help. The National Strategy for the Advancement of Iraqi Women has initiated programs to open nurseries and kindergartens in all residential and work areas to promote female participation in the labor force.

Women as Business Owners

Women business owners can be found in the construction business and in the traditional Iraqi palm plantation businesses. The government, the U.S. military, the U.N., and several NGOs are also actively promoting female entrepreneurship in Iraq through training and lending initiatives. These efforts seem to have an impact as there is an increased demand for equipment credit for sewing machines, market stands, vending carts, looms for weaving, and equipment for beauty services. An equal demand is anticipated in loans for raw materials such as cloth, yarn, thread, or saleable products for markets and bazaars.

Reconstruction contracts worth more than 250 million dollars have been awarded to female-owned businesses in Iraq, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is actively providing additional business opportunities to Iraqi women. The transitional government, with the assistance of the U.N., offers support for female-owned businesses via enterprise skills sessions that have benefited hundreds of women in Basra, Az Zubayr, and Umm Qasr.

Women in Enterprise, an organization in partnership with several women's organizations, also run weekly workshops, business mentoring sessions, and have developed a comprehensive program that supports women from developing a business idea to establishing a running business activity. Women for Women International Iraq is another organization that has provided vocational skills training program to women in such areas as carpentry, folk arts and crafts, hairdressing, and other more traditional skills like embroidery and beadwork. The graduates of this program receive support to develop income-generating plans, to access credit, and to register and run an enterprise.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Iraqis make a clear distinction between the public and private areas of their life, each having its own code of conduct. Friends and close family take the liberty of using first names, but business associates should only do so after being specifically invited to do so. Status and respect for others plays an integral part of Iraqi culture, so it is very

important to use your Iraqi counterpart's appropriate title followed by their surname. It is also important to avoid being too frank with potential Iraqi partners because any perception of criticism or confrontation, real or imagined, will cause a "loss of face" that makes any type of business deal impossible. Businesswomen visiting Iraq are expected to dress in a formal and conservative manner.

Ireland

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditionally, Irish women have been homemakers, playing the dominant role in domestic life and contributing to community projects and charity work in their spare time. Today, a vast majority of women work in either part-time or full-time jobs, and many of them have found their way into the male bastions of academia, law, business, and politics.

The accession of Ireland to the European Union led to the enactment of legislation securing women's right to equal pay and equal treatment in employment. Irish courts have further reinforced women's rights, and the legislature is also working on preventing gender discrimination. The possible accession of Ireland to the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women would further address issues on housing, illegitimacy, and citizenship rights.

These recent developments serve as the latest steps in a long process to reshape Ireland's traditional patriarchal society. Voluntary women's groups, both local and national, have been working in Ireland for years to highlight women's issues such as education, childcare, and gender discrimination. Forty-five women's organizations under the aegis of the Council for the Status of Women and assisted by government funding raise awareness, push for reform, and promote educational programs, especially those designed to assist single and rural women. These rural women shoulder responsibility for farm work, rearing animals, and caring for their extended families, and they have sustained the hardest hits of poverty and physical hardship.

Women remain underrepresented in politics, law, and medicine. Women entrepreneurs constitute a mere 5 percent of total entrepreneurs. Irish women expect any disadvantages they might experience in terms of equal pay and access to male-dominated professional sectors to diminish under the glare of the strong E.U. laws regarding gender equality.

A lack of dress code restrictions for Irish women enables them to wear typical Western European attire at work.

Legal Rights

The Irish Constitution grants equal rights to women. In 1918, women obtained suffrage. They also have general rights to drive vehicles and to own and inherit property. However, there exists a slight degree of male preference in bequeathal of farms.

The law making abortion illegal in Ireland has been amended to permit therapeutic abortion. The Supreme Court made an unprecedented decision to grant the right to travel to obtain an abortion, following a suicide bid by a 14-year-old rape victim. This prompted legislation to grant the right to receive information on abortion services outside Ireland. Due to Roman Catholic Church opposition, Ireland was the last country in Europe to legalize abortion, in 1995.

An increase in divorce and separation has developed in Ireland since the first divorce was granted in 1997.

Education

The Irish Constitution grants men and women equal rights to education, and in 2004, girls surpassed boys in terms of their average level of education. The Department of Education provides free education at primary and secondary levels and subsidized higher education. Both men and women have a literacy rate of 99 percent. A school drop-out rate at the secondary level remains high, but the retention rate for girls exceeds that for boys. Authorities consider the lack of funds, which has led to crowded classrooms, responsible for the high rate of drop-outs. Traditional single-sex schools recently began changing into coeducational institutions.

Additional vocational educational support for women comes from training programs conducted by AnCO, the Irish Industrial Training Authority, which focuses on increasing access to employment. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions also adopted a Women's Charter, redesigned its structure to increase female representation at higher levels, formed women's committees within each trade union, established an annual women's conference, and reserved two seats for women on the Congress' National Executive Committee.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Irish women choose their own life partners, and start dating in their teens. Boys and girls generally meet in post-secondary educational institutions, colleges, workplaces, and social networks. The legal age of marriage is 18 years. Irish women rarely retain their maiden name after marriage, and a great majority of them use their husband's surname.

Traditional models regard men as the primary breadwinner in the family and women as caretakers of the home and children. Women no longer solely brave responsibility for home and family. Societal views of childless women, once considered career-obsessed or the objects of pity, have demonstrated a gradual change.

Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, including rights under family law and property law. In the event of a divorce, courts usually award primary custody to the mother, and in some cases, award parents joint custody.

Polygamy is illegal in Ireland.

Health

The Department of Health in Ireland provides public health care free of cost or at a nominal cost. Voluntary bodies also provide health care with financial aid from the State.

Ireland has seen remarkable growth in health services in the past decade. The establishment of a community care network has resulted in a rapid decline in maternal and infant mortality rates. Women receive maternity and infant care service that includes a free hospital stay, nursing, medical, surgical, and midwifery services. The infant mortality rate has dipped to a low of 5 for every 1,000 live births.

The government lacks a policy on family planning, but it sponsors certain associations involved in family planning activities. The Irish Family Planning Association offers contraception and counseling to women. Pharmacies also make contraceptives available.

Interesting Social Customs

Irish women consider it lucky if their wedding dress accidentally tears on the wedding day. In bygone days, rifles were fired into the air to salute the couple as they emerged from church. Today, people honk car horns instead.

Women in Business

General View

Women make up 42 percent of the labor force in Ireland, but women are frequently found in low-paid, low-skilled occupations. Married women have a lower participation in economic activity compared to other European countries, and very few women hold senior management positions.

Better education, more employment opportunities, and lower birth rates have, however, had a positive influence on women in the workplace, particularly in sectors like tourism, marketing, and finance. The election of two women Presidents in the last fifteen years has also given an impetus to women's empowerment.

Legal Rights

Irish women were granted the right to vote in 1918; they also have the legal right of inheritance. The Constitution grants gender equality in the workplace, but disparities still exist in pay and promotions. The gender pay differential in Ireland has declined in recent years and is about 13 percent. In 1994 women's wages in the industrial sector were found to be about 60 percent of men's wages. Efforts are underway to reduce the gap by providing childcare services, reviewing taxation, and providing family-related leave. Women have the rights to acquire and manage property irrespective of their marital status.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, women have been engaged in feminized jobs like cooking, cleaning, typing, or working in clothing factories. Most of these jobs were in the minimum wage, part-time service sector.

Successful women entrepreneurs include Rita Shah, co-founder of the Shabra Plastic recycling company and an awardee of the Irish Business Woman of the Year award in 2003; Ann Corcoran, founder and managing director of Limetree, an advertising and marketing agency; Darina Allen, owner and manager of the internationally renowned Ballymaloe Cookery School at Shanagarry; Shauna Herron, one of the first female site managers in Northern Ireland and owner of a specialist civil engineering company; Helen Hall, founder of Hallmark Solutions, a leading supplier of human resource software.

In 2004 the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor reported a significant rise in the number of Irish women planning a new entrepreneurial activity. Male entrepreneurs still start about three times as many new businesses as women.

Lack of adequate pre-school childcare makes it difficult for working women to balance family and work life. Friends and family provide day care for working parents. The government and the EU funded the Equal Opportunities Child Care Programme with a view to increasing and maintaining accessible and affordable childcare facilities. An ambitious project to create an additional 50,000 childcare centers is in the works, and the government has introduced a new child-minding tax relief to increase the presence of home-based childcare.

Women as Business Owners

Irish women typically own businesses in the high-risk sectors of service and retail. The difficulty in obtaining capital, lack of training and experience, and the burden of household responsibilities generally account for the gender imbalance in the business sector.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The Irish business community is very cordial to foreign businesswomen. It is considered inappropriate for a foreign businesswoman to invite an Irishman to dinner, but a lunch invitation is acceptable. If the woman wishes to pay for the meal, she should mention it ahead of time.

Foreigners often find it helpful to use a third party to help initiate business. The Irish dislike bureaucracy and rigid plans, preferring to improvise rather than to adhere to well laid-out plans. In fact, you might find yourself conducting business on the golf course. Avoid business meetings in the months of July and August.

Israel

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Israeli society has become a blend of the ultra-orthodox, orthodox, and the liberal. This means that the role and position of women varies according to each of these sub-cultures in Israeli society. Various women join the army, take up high-ranking jobs, and become active in the country's various economic, political, and professional spheres. Others, however, whose "place is strictly at home" venture out only when fully covered, and live out the traditional roles of homemaker and wife. In general, however, Israeli women play active and important roles in all areas of the country's society and public life.

Israel remains a male-dominated society, and though women have made enormous strides in the past few decades, much remains to be done to ensure gender equality.

Most Israeli women prove liberal and progressive. They believe in equaling and, if possible, outdoing the men in various fields of society. Families of orthodox women, both Jewish and Muslim, on the other hand, raise females to believe that they play a supporting role to male members of the family, and this severely limits their participation in many activities.

The status of Israeli women depends on various social, economic and most importantly, religious factors. The strongly patriarchal Halakha (Jewish religious law) controls the affairs of Orthodox family life in the country, and its policies greatly influence Jewish Orthodox women.

The changing position of Israeli women can be seen as more women pursue higher education and demonstrate an awareness of their rights. More importantly, they reveal a willingness to fight for them. A number of women's organizations have led various campaigns and protests with the aim of gaining greater rights. As a result, Israeli laws have been changed to allow women greater participation in society, including the all-important army.

In politics, women occupy 15 percent of the seats in the Knesset. The Cabinet, with 20 members, has two female members. In the judiciary, three women judges grace the Supreme Court, 36 female District Court judges serve, and women comprise about 34 percent of all the judges in the country. Additionally, a woman holds the post of State Attorney. In September 2008, the acting Prime Minister, the speaker of the Knesset, and the President of the Supreme Court were all women.

Israeli women comprise about 80 percent of the personnel in the medical field and other forms of health care. However, Israeli women lag behind the men in the business sector, with most women preferring salaried employment to self-employment. Statistics seem to indicate that only about 10 percent of Israeli women own their own businesses.

Israel has become a mix of various religious and ethnic cultures such as Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, Arabs, Bedouins, Palestinians, Christians, Baha'i, Druze and other groups. The position of women differs from group to

group, depending on their traditional and religious customs and beliefs. Minority groups generally experience greater disadvantages than Israeli Jews.

Modern Israeli women usually follow a casual Western style of dress, while Orthodox Jewish and Muslim women dress very conservatively.

Legal Rights

Israeli law grants women the same legal rights as men in every respect, and prohibits discrimination against them. Israeli women earned the right to vote in 1948.

Israel's civil law grants women the right to inherit and own property. Jewish religious law prohibits women from inheriting property, but in most cases, families follow civil law, unless both spouses specifically agree to abide by the ruling of the religious court.

Abortion remains illegal in Israel, and the law permits it only under certain circumstances: when the life, or physical or mental health of the mother is at risk; when the mother is under the legal marriageable age of 17 or above the age of 40; when severe physical or mental impairment of the baby threatens; or, when the child is conceived in sexual relations prohibited by the Criminal Code, like rape or incest. A Pregnancy Termination Committee grants the approvals for abortion, and the abortion must be performed in a recognized medical institution.

Civil law grants Israeli women the right to initiate divorce. Religious law, however, requires that the divorced spouse give his consent to make the divorce possible. This means that women under Orthodox law may not divorce husbands who refuse to give their consent or who remain physically absent.

Israeli society expects women to play the primary role in rearing the children. Furthermore, it normally grants them sole custody of younger children (six years of age or less). Courts grant joint custody only if both parties agree to it.

Education

Education, accessible to both boys and girls, remains free and compulsory until the ninth grade. Israel maintains a co-educational model of schooling where Israeli boys and girls share the same classroom space.

Females comprise almost half the student population at the university level, with women outnumbering the men in many courses. According to 2004 estimates, the literacy rate for Israeli women reached 96 percent, and the corresponding figure for men climbed to 98 percent.

Estimates based on various studies have shown that about 90 percent of all Israeli girls complete their secondary education, with a majority of them going on to complete their higher studies as well. However, girls from certain ethnic groups, such as the Bedouins, maintain high, early drop-out rates.

Educated Israeli women have the same access to jobs as men, although women dominate the so-called "feminized" employment sectors such as teaching, social work, medicine, and secretarial work.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, families arranged marriages in Israel, but times have changed. Men and women these days choose their own spouses, although culture deeply frowns upon intermarriage between a Jew and a non-Jew, which remains illegal. The couple can circumvent this law, however, by marrying abroad. According to Israeli law, a woman can choose to retain her family name if she so wishes. If she chooses to adopt her husband's surname, she can still revert back to her own family name in the event of a divorce.

Culture permits Israeli women to date, and the practice has become a part of their culture. Most Israelis begin dating when in their teens and carry on until their early 20s. Israeli women most commonly meet men at beaches, bars, and other meeting places in the cities.

According to Israeli civil law, the minimum legal marriageable age for girls is 17 years, though this tends to vary according to the religious laws of various ethnic groups. The average age for an Israeli woman to get married is 24.5 years. Israeli law prohibits polygamy, which citizens very rarely, if ever, practice.

Men have traditionally been the heads of the household in Israeli society, but that has become a thing of the past. More women these days head households jointly with their husbands, and studies show that single mothers head 10 percent of all families in Israel. Israel, a strongly religious and family-oriented society, considers childlessness a bad thing and looks upon a barren woman as unlucky.

Israel's civil law stipulates that in the event of a divorce, the woman retains entitlement to half the share of the family's assets and to all assets she owned prior to getting married. The court makes final decisions regarding custody of children, and requires fathers to whom it denies custody, to support the child's upbringing until the child reaches the age of 15.

Israeli women have the rights to hold assets separately from their husbands. Domestic violence and abuse remains a major problem in Israel, with about 150,000 to 200,000 cases reported each year.

Health

Israel's standards of healthcare rank among the highest in the world, and women have equal access to all healthcare facilities. The life expectancy of Jewish women at 81.2 years exceeds that of the men, whose life expectancy is 77.3 years.

About 99 percent of all births in Israel take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. Maternal mortality rates for the year 2000 stood at 5 deaths per 100,000 live births. The infant mortality rate for 2006 was 6.89 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Israeli law permits women to make their own healthcare decisions, although in the more Orthodox families, men usually make such decisions. Women have good access to various birth control methods, and contraceptives prove easily available. In 2003, estimates showed that about 52 percent of Israeli women used modern contraceptive methods. Certain religious bodies, however, condemn the use of birth control.

Interesting Social Customs

Social interactions in Israeli society remain very informal, often to the point of being mistaken for rudeness. People

do not speak the words "please" and "thank you" unless absolutely meant.

Women in Business

General View

Israeli women are active participants in Israel's economy and make up nearly half of the country's workforce. Though women have a presence in all areas of employment, they are concentrated in professions such as teaching, social work, nursing and secretarial work. The number of Israeli women in the business sector remains low. Pregnant women and mothers are most likely to face discrimination.

The status of women in business is changing, mostly due to new laws and the efforts of Israeli women themselves. Women's chances of achieving high-level positions in business and other arenas are continually increasing.

Legal Rights

Israel's Constitution guarantees women all the legal rights that men enjoy. Israeli women were granted the right to vote in 1948. Israel's civil laws allow a woman to inherit and own property. The country's religious laws, however, prohibit women from owning and inheriting property or businesses. Unless specifically stated otherwise by a spouse, civil law takes precedence over religious law.

Gender discrimination in pay packages is a punishable offence according to the Israeli Constitution, but Israeli women earn less than men. Studies have shown that Israeli men and women in the age bracket of 15 to 24 earn the same salaries, but the pay disparity increases as women age and move towards high-ranking positions.

Women in Professions

Israeli women tend to work at jobs in the educational, social service, medical, childcare, and administrative sectors, though they are quite well represented in other areas such as law, politics, and the military. Though women hold a number of high positions in businesses, public institutions, the judiciary, civil service, and scientific institutions, their numbers are relatively low considering that they make up about half the entire workforce. Some Israeli women are well-recognized, such as Galia Maor, President and CEO of Bank Leumi, responsible for increasing the bank's revenue and profit. Another female executive, Ofra Strauss-Lahat, Chairman of the Strauss-Elite group, was listed by Fortune magazine as "one of the 50 most powerful women in the business world." Strauss-Elite is Israel's second-biggest food company.

The percentage of Israeli women setting up businesses remains comparatively low. The government is trying to encourage women's participation in the business sector. All professions are open to Israeli women. In the military, Israeli women can serve as fighters in combat units only in a limited way and are not allowed to serve on submarines, but they still can and do achieve high-level positions.

Most Israeli women dress casually, and no dress code restrictions prevent women from working in any particular profession. Orthodox Jewish women do choose their clothes according to religious laws, but these restrictions do not prohibit them from employment on the relatively rare occasions when they choose to work outside the home.

In collective families, other family members care for the children when the mother is at work. Working mothers from nuclear families use daycare centers for childcare. Statesponsored childcare is available in Israel though daycare centers.

Women as Business Owners

Women who own businesses make up a miniscule portion of the entire Israeli female population. Women lag behind men in being self-employed or employers, with most women choosing salaried work to self-employment. Female-owned businesses in Israel typically concentrate on the service and retail sectors. Women are poorly represented in business sectors such as manufacturing, and in large businesses in general.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are treated with respect. Friendliness and trust must be developed over time, as Israelis are generally not inclined to trust someone without knowing them thoroughly. Israelis like to perform many tasks at the same time, and their relationship styles are very informal, to the point of seeming rude and arrogant to an outsider. Lack of punctuality is also common in Israel and should not be misinterpreted as a sign of disrespect. When either situation arises, it's important to stay calm and polite. A foreign businesswoman should bear in mind that Israelis highly value relationships in business. If an Israeli invites you to his or her home, assume the invitation is sincere. It's important to accept these invitations as a means of building a good relationship. When hosting an Israeli, always offer coffee or a soft drink.

Italy

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Although the woman's traditional image in Italy's patriarchal society appears submissive and compliant, Italian women increasingly aspire toward independence and economic activity. With support from legislation, Italian women's level of education parallels with men's today. However, less than 40 percent of Italian women procure formal employment, so economic participation remains limited.

Though Italian women have equal opportunities for education and employment, they often assume the stereotypical roles of wives and mothers. Many women seeking employment become discouraged by discrimination in the workplace, in terms of lower wages and fewer promotions. Working women also face extra challenges at home, as men's contribution to household work in Italy remains minimal. Many Italian women have taken to self-employment for economic independence.

Although laws do not restrict women's participation in government, few women hold elected office. Women hold only 10 percent of seats in Parliament. They also remain underrepresented in business administration and management, holding only 21 percent of jobs in those fields. Women fare a bit better as doctors and lawyers, and hold about 45 percent of professional and technical jobs.

Women in rural areas experience more subjection to male dominance, but because 70 percent of the Italian population lives in urban areas, serious issues tend to be isolated. Even in rural areas, increasing numbers of women act as farm managers rather than simply drudge workers, thus endorsing times of change.

Non-Italians comprise only 6 percent of the population, but women in ethnic minorities sometimes face additional challenges. However, all are equal before the Italian law.

Legal Rights

Women have equal rights in regard to property, inheritance, marriage, divorce, education, employment, health care, and driving, and received the right to vote in

1945. They have reproductive rights, the right to have an abortion, and to decide about the number and spacing of children. Authorities require parental authorization for abortions for women under 18.

Women can also initiate divorce, which was made legal only in 1970. They have equal rights with respect to the custody of children after divorce. Italian courts decide custody arrangements, maintenance, and property issues on a case-by-case basis.

Education

Italian women have the same access to educational opportunities as men. The literacy rate for Italian women stood at 98.6 percent in 2003, compared to 99 percent for men. The ratio of women among first university degree holders has reached 61 percent—the highest ratio in developed countries. Women have started to study technical subjects like mathematics, engineering, manufacturing, construction, and computer sciences at the same rate as men. In spite of that, women still prefer humanities over science or medicine, which limits them to certain sectors, jobs, and career levels. Increasing numbers of women study for PhDs. Coeducation prevails at all levels of schooling.

Italian women have begun to enter the workforce at the same rate as men, but even the top well-qualified women often encounter the glass ceiling in employment. In some sectors, a man who completes 10 years of work still proves twice as likely to be promoted as a woman with the same experience. This has resulted in significant differences in wages for men and women.

Level of education makes a big difference in Italy. Seventy-seven percent of women with college degrees have jobs in Italy, compared with 88 percent of men. Of women who ended their education at secondary school, 39 percent are employed, compared to 79 percent of men with the same education.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Arranged marriages, historically the norm in Italy, no longer set the precedent. Almost all Italians marry, but today, women possess the freedom to choose their own

spouses. Women date, with norms for dating paralleling Western European averages. Still, many young Italians prefer to go out in groups. Young people meet in colleges, at social gatherings or at the workplace. The average age for a woman to marry for the first time is 27.

Married women need not take their husband's name, though they may use it along with their own surname if they wish. If a woman does assume her husband's name upon marriage, she must give it up after divorce.

Most women run their own homes. They usually freely make decisions about household matters and control the family budget. Married women can also own and manage assets independently. Men's participation in domestic chores has increased only marginally over time, and Italian women still do over 70 percent of the household work.

Although Italian families have traditionally been large, no stigma accompanies a woman's choice to have few or no children in Italy, today. The fertility rates stand at just 1.2 births per woman, and the Italian government has begun to provide incentives to raise fertility rates. In cases of divorce, courts usually award parents joint custody of the children.

Polygamy, neither legal nor socially acceptable in Italy, occasionally surfaces in a few minority communities.

Health

The Italian government guarantees equal access to health care for all. Poor people receive free healthcare services. Life expectancy for women has reached 80 years, compared to 74 years for men. Women have access to reproductive healthcare services including ultrasound scanning and prenatal counseling. The proportion of cesarean-section deliveries, particularly in private clinics, remains high. The maternal mortality rate in 1990 stood at 12 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Italian law allows abortion on all grounds up to 90 days into the pregnancy, after which it permits it only to save the mother's life. Women seeking abortion need a physician's certificate, must wait at least seven days, and must undergo counseling. An abortion must be performed only in an authorized medical facility or a public healthcare center. However, because health care providers can opt out of providing abortion services as "conscientious objectors," many healthcare facilities, especially in Southern Italy, do not offer these services. Women sometimes wait 30 days to have an abortion performed at a public hospital, and the number of illegal abortions performed in Italy remains high.

About 32 percent of women of 18 to 44 years of age use modern contraceptives, which they find readily available. No stigma accompanies use of contraceptives.

Interesting Social Customs

Tattoos, body piercing, fake jewelry, cheap perfumes/colognes, synthetic clothing, oversized clothing, shorts, sleeveless dresses, baseball caps, fanny packs, flip-flops, tennis shoes and clothes printed with logos do not fare very well among Italians.

Women in Business

General View

The percentage of working women in Italy ranks among the lowest in Europe at just 45 percent. Their economic

opportunities or the quality of economic involvement is also less than their European counterparts, as most of them are employed in unskilled, low-paid occupations. Part-time employment is also common among women. This has led to a gender gap where women's wages are 29 percent lower than men, and their overall earned income is 46 percent less than men.

despite equal opportunities, the number of women in managerial and decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors remains very low, except in family-run businesses. Female representation in politics is also low. Women have made major inroads, however, in the professions and in the creation of new businesses.

Women's economic activity is different in the industrialized Northern and the more agricultural South. Rural women are involved in farming and other agriculture-related activities, including into agro-tourism and organic farming.

Legal Rights

Italian women have all rights towards property, inheritance, marriage, education, healthcare, and reproduction. Law prohibits any discrimination at work on any grounds. The Equal Opportunity Commission, the Labor Ministry, and other government offices ensure women's rights at the workplace.

The right to vote was granted to women in 1945. Women hold 11.5 percent of the seats in lower house, 8.1 percent of the seats in the upper house, and there are also women at the ministerial level.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Italian women were limited to household work, working in the family business, or working in the fields. Better educational standards have led to increased representation of women in professional jobs and executive positions. The percentage of females employed in agriculture, industry, and services were 5 percent, 20 percent, and 75 percent respectively, as of 2002. Work in the service sector includes public sector positions (like work in post offices). Popular areas of employment include healthcare, fashion, teaching, and the arts (music, writing, entertainment).

There has been a 2.4-fold increase in the number of independent women professionals as well. Women are taking up professions like medicine and law on par with men and already make up 25 percent of magistrates. Unemployment among women runs as high that of men, although women are more likely to lose their jobs during recession.

In almost all sectors, women's involvement in higher positions still remains limited. A recent survey by Italy's Chambers of Commerce Union indicated that 40 percent of employers prefer men in executive positions. Preferences notwithstanding, many women head largenterprises including: Letizia Brichetto Arnaboldi Moratti, the former media industry mogul and politically conservative mayor of Milan; Olga Mondello Franza, head of a billion-dollar construction, hotel, and transportation business; and Marina Berlusconi, vice chairman of Fininvest.

A few restrictions do exist. By law, women cannot work in underground in mines, tunnels, or quarries. Pregnant women and new mothers are not allowed to work at night. But as far as dress code, no restrictions exist for Italian women. Dressing is conservative, with suits or formal dresses at the workplace.

Women are primarily responsible to their houses and children. This is the reason for many of them to take up part-time employment. Working mothers leave their children with grandparents or at private childcare centers. Some public childcare centers exist in urban areas, but there is no state-sponsored child-care.

Women as Business Owners

There has been a significant increase in the number of women entrepreneurs in Italy. Their number increased by 2.8 times between 1993 and 2003. Women now represent 22 percent of total entrepreneurs, and among new businesses set up within the last several years the proportion of women has increased to 38 percent. The percentage of Italian female entrepreneurs with employees is also higher than that of other European countries.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are well respected in Italian workplaces, although some flirting is common in social settings. Using local agents can prove useful since many

Italian businessmen prefer a local point of contact with whom they can converse in Italian. Having bilingual business cards is also helpful.

Business meetings, especially the initial ones, run slow and can involve lengthy and detailed discussions. Personal conduct and making a “good impression” with one’s attire, language, punctuality, and manners is important. Italians have an impeccable and elegant style of clothing, an important part of their culture—as such, visiting business persons are advised to follow suit. Address associates and seniors by their last names preceded by their formal title. Shaking hands with everyone is accepted, and women should extend their hand first when meeting male associates. Eye contact is also important.

Do not bring up business during social gatherings. Gestures are elaborately used, but foreigners need to be familiar with them before using them so as to avoid negative impressions. The American style of waving one’s hand is not considered respectful.

Jamaica

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

While men remain the primary breadwinners in Jamaica, Jamaican women have become far more socially and economically independent in recent years. Women’s work primarily supplemented the family income at one time, but these days, large numbers of self-employed women manage their own businesses. Access to education has opened up the professions, especially for women from the middle and upper classes. The government has helped by giving women equal legal status, more educational opportunities, and employment in the public sector, often in positions of authority.

Women also are entering the political arena. The 60-member House of Representatives has 7 female members, the 21-member Senate includes 5 women, and 3 women hold seats among the 17 Cabinet ministers.

No dress code restrictions exist for Jamaican women. Traditional female dress in Jamaica features a bandana skirt with a blouse and a head tie. The traditional Jamaican blouse, white with ruffled sleeves and neck, typically displays embroidery. Dressing decently at work, preferably in a long skirt or pants, remains important. Women enjoy respectful treatment in the workplace, and colleagues usually address them with a Ms. or a Mrs. before their last name.

Legal Rights

Jamaican women stand equal to men under the law. They cannot be prevented from entering civil, public, or judicial office because of their gender or marital status. The law protects women from discrimination, harassment, and domestic violence, and Parliament recently ratified the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against

Women, in order to further strengthen this protection. Remuneration remains the most common area of discrimination faced by women in the workplace, as employers routinely ignore the law guaranteeing equal pay for equal work.

Jamaican women received the right to vote in 1944. They also have the right to inherit, own, and manage property, and to apply for their share in a property if they have contributed to its acquisition, either directly or indirectly. They also hold certain rights over jointly owned property. Citizenship is granted a Jamaican through marriage or adoption. A woman also has the right to give her approval for the issuance of passports to her children.

Jamaican law prohibits abortion, as per the Offences Against the Person Act of 1864. Violators, including the woman who causes her own abortion, can suffer imprisonment for life, which may include hard labor. Medical doctors can perform an abortion, however, to save the life of the woman or to preserve her physical and mental health.

Jamaican law allows divorce on the grounds of an “irretrievable breakdown” of the marriage. Petitioning partners have to have been married for at least two years prior to petitioning. They must also prove that they have been living separately for at least a year prior to petitioning and that they have tried to reconcile through counseling. The man must provide maintenance to his ex-wife after divorce, unless she has been guilty of unjustified abandonment or adultery. The woman must pay for the maintenance of her ex-husband and children, if she has property, and he is destitute. The couple has to include their financial provisions for the children in the divorce’s custody application.

Women enjoy several employment rights under the Employment of Women Act of 1942. They may not work night shifts (except in certain sectors/jobs) and cannot be made to work for more than 10 hours in a 24-hour day. The

Act also restricts women from being employed in industrial undertakings before or after childbirth. It further prohibits inequality in pay for men and women involved in the same kind of work. It guarantees women eight weeks of maternity leave with pay, with an option for another four weeks of leave without pay, if required. Eligibility for other leave extensions remains available under certain conditions.

Women have access to credit, but they need their husband's written consent before applying for a loan, or written confirmation from a lawyer asserting their legal rights.

Education

All Jamaican citizens have equal access to free, compulsory education, and 99 percent of all children in the age group of 6-11 enroll in school. Attendance rates, however, remain as low as 50 percent in some schools, especially in the rural areas. In some areas, a higher number of girls than boys attend school, more so at the secondary and university stages. Both coeducational and single-gender schools exist in Jamaica. The adult female literacy rate in 2004 stood at 84 percent, compared to the male rate of 91 percent. Currently, greater numbers of Jamaican women enter into traditionally male-dominated fields like technology and engineering.

Dating, Marriage and Family

The legal marriageable age in Jamaica is 18 years. Parental or guardian consent is required for marrying before 18 years of age, and this applies to the remarriage of widows as well. If a parent denies permission, a further petition can be made to the court. Teen marriages occur very rarely, and the median marriageable age has become the early 30s for both men and women. Many individuals decide for themselves when and whom to marry, and in many families, they still seek parental approval. Dating, common in society, starts at the age of 16 or 17, but young people prefer to go out together in groups rather than as a couple. An increasing tendency towards consensual relationships has developed in recent years. Spouses and children from such relationships retain legal rights regarding property. The law prohibits polygamous marriages.

Women generally take their husband's name after marriage, and absorb primary responsibility regarding house and family. Society expects women to conceive children; otherwise, women face the humiliation of being branded as a "mule."

Women have the right to initiate divorces, and they also have equal rights and responsibilities regarding their children and their maintenance. Jamaican women received the right to own and control individual property as early as 1887. Married women can initiate criminal action to safeguard their property.

Health

Jamaica boasts a well-developed and widely available healthcare system. Women have all rights to access health care and make their own decisions, except in cases of abortion, in which spousal approval proves mandatory. The Ministry of Health runs several private as well as public hospitals. NGOs, the church, and private doctors also provide innumerable healthcare centers. Pregnant women have access to prenatal care in any of these centers. Women, aware of modern contraceptive

methods for family planning, utilize them. The infant mortality rate in 2006, a respectable 16 per 1,000 live births, stands in marked contrast to the maternal mortality rate—a very high 120 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Interesting Social Customs

Jamaicans believe that children will inherit the behaviors their parents exhibited during the pregnancy period. Jamaicans, therefore, closely observe and control the behavior of pregnant women.

The use of traditional medicine, including spiritual therapies, remains common, especially among the majority of African communities. Modern medicine becomes a last resort after traditional medicines fail.

Women in Business

General View

Jamaican women are active in all areas of Jamaican economic life. Despite the fact that women head 40 percent of Jamaican households, out of which 60 percent are considered poor, they are actively involved in the agricultural local sector, clerical and secretarial work, the public sector, and in social and development activities in community and urban centers. Jamaican women generally prefer the public sector to the private sector in matters of employment. There are many women active as proprietors and participants in micro and small businesses as wholesaler, retailers, and providers of personal services. A few women hold positions as senior and mid-level managers. Traditional attitudes toward women's role in society are gradually changing, and the contribution of women to the economy is being more widely recognized.

Legal Rights

Jamaican women have had voting rights since 1944. The Constitution and the 1975 Employment Act accords women full equality including equal pay for equal work. In 1985, the Jamaican government further affirmed women's rights to full participation in the political and public life of the nation. Women, whether single or married, have the right to purchase, sell, and own property in their own names. These statutory laws frequently fail, however, in implementation.

Women in Professions

Women have been traditionally involved in the agricultural business as small producers, marketers, and laborers. Today 45 percent of agricultural producers are women. Women are also actively involved as teachers and as producers of traditional handicrafts.

Many Jamaican women have reached executive position in companies and also own businesses: Gina Green owns 40 acres of high mountain coffee; Joyce Mandison is owner of Joyce's Vital products; Joan Gaynor Miller is director of Foods and Flora Jamaica Ltd.; and, Dorianne Rowan Campbell is owner of the organic farm, Blue Mountain.

Today, women are found in almost all segments of employment. The Jamaican government does not bar women from any legalized profession, and no dress code restriction exists for Jamaican women. Women generally wear European style clothing.

Working women from the educated and professionally qualified circle employ nannies, or domestic help to care for their children. For lower-income women it is very often the older sibling who takes on the role of babysitter when the mother is at work. In the more rural interior of Jamaica, grandmothers, relatives, and neighbors take care of the children of working women. The government has taken steps to establish the Women's Centre of Jamiaca Foundation, which successfully runs daycare centers and nurseries to aid the working mother.

Women as Business Owners

Many women are self-employed today. Although many early ventures lacked proper access to credit, today the situation is changing, and special schemes to encourage

women entrepreneurs in terms of training and credit are active and making a difference. A survey of women entrepreneurs found 36 percent involved in garment production and the rest involved in health products, cosmetology, restaurants and related services, gift and floral retailing, and the production of food products.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The men of Jamaica, although conservative, treat foreign businesswomen with the same respect that they would accord a man in a similar position. Attire should be formal and deference should be paid to people in senior positions. Businesswomen should take care not to discuss business matters during lunch, since the Jamaicans strictly do not believe 'talking shop' during mealtime.

Japan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The stereotypical image of submissive Japanese women has a basis of truth in many traditional households, where wives are expected to do the housework and take care of the children while men work long hours and wield the authority in the family. The increasing number of women in the workforce, the difficulty in climbing the corporate ladder in Japan, the expense of raising children, and the younger generation's rejection of patriarchal values has caused a major rift, where more women are now choosing careers and personal freedom over the traditional path of early marriage and motherhood.

Princess Masako of the Japanese royal family is a popular living example of the pull between the traditional and modern worlds, since she gave up a very promising career in order to marry and bear an heir to the Japanese imperial throne (after refusing the prince's first two marriage proposals).

Even those in the majority who do decide to get married and have children are getting married later, having fewer children, and asserting themselves more in their households. These patterns are in response to the fact that women who choose to work and have a family have to work very hard at it. Government research showed that full-time working men spent 26 minutes each weekday on domestic chores, compared to 3 hours, 18 minutes by full-time working women. Working part-time is not an attractive option, since women are paid less than half the rates of full-time workers and childcare options are both limited and expensive.

While male domination has decreased significantly in recent decades, Japan can still legitimately be called a patriarchal society. Domestic violence is a problem, with 1 out of 20 women experiencing "life-threatening" violence. Women are verbally honored at their workplaces, but are often subject to discriminatory practices and attitudes.

In politics, the total portion of women in the upper and lower seats of the Parliament in 2005 was 9.3 percent, with 10 percent of ministerial positions held by women. In

the judiciary, Japan has had a couple of women who held the post of Justice of the Supreme Court. The number of women passing the National Bar Examination has also increased over the last few years.

Japanese women are actively involved in the medical field. In the business sector, an increasing number of women are setting up their own businesses, and this growth is expected to continue.

Urban women enjoy a status that is on par with the men in almost all areas of society, but rural women are more vulnerable to traditional, discriminatory patriarchal attitudes and practices. Japan's pockets of poorer rural populations live in harsh conditions, the reality of which is often masked by Japan's overall prosperity. Women from such areas live a hand-to-mouth existence, with limited access to economic opportunities, and there have even been reported cases of people starving to death. The Ainu, Buraku, and people of Korean descent are particular social groups who have experienced a lot of discrimination. Women from these groups have faced difficult challenges, as shown by the statistic that only five percent of Buraku women have attended school.

There are no dress code restrictions for Japanese women.

Legal Rights

According to Japan's Constitution, women are eligible for all the legal rights enjoyed by men. Women received the right to vote in 1945. They also have the right to drive and to own and inherit property.

Japanese law permits an abortion in certain circumstances, such as when the parents are suffering from a hereditary infirmity, if the life or economic status of the mother is at risk, if there is severe fetal impairment, or if the pregnancy is the result of a rape. Japan's abortion laws, however, are liberally interpreted, and abortions are almost available on request.

It is easy for a Japanese woman to initiate and obtain a divorce. In a divorce, women can lay claim to custody of the children and in most cases, are awarded sole custody.

Education

Japan has the second largest higher educational system in the developed world. Girls have equal access to quality education. According to 2003 estimates, the literacy rate for Japanese women was 99 percent, which is on par with that of the men.

Virtually 100 percent of Japan's girls complete their primary education, with a majority of them going on to complete their higher education as well. Boys choose technical courses in colleges while girls choose vocational courses such as commerce, culture, and design. The number of co-educational institutions is increasing, although single-sex schools are preferred by some families due to deep-rooted patriarchal values.

There is still a "glass ceiling" in Japan where working women feel they need to be more talented and hardworking than their male colleagues if they are to expect any promotion or improvement in their current designations.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Weddings that are purely based on an attraction between individuals are common in urban areas, while people from rural areas generally prefer unions arranged by matchmakers. The mean marrying age for Japanese women is 26 years, and that for men is 28 years. According to a survey in 2000, 75 percent of Japanese women aged 30-34 were unmarried, and this percentage is on the rise.

Dating is very common in Japan, and young people generally start dating at the age of fifteen. Girls and boys can meet at movie theaters, discotheques, and other, similar hangouts. Some use the services of dating agencies.

According to Japan's Civil Law, a newly married couple can take either the husband's or the wife's surname. However, 98 percent of the couples select the husband's surname and most women change their surnames. Japanese women can hold assets separately from their husbands.

Japanese women are having fewer children and they are having them much later in life. Japan's birth rate is one of the lowest in the developed world at 1.29 children per woman in 2003, down from 1.54 in 1990. Although childless couples are rare in Japan, there is no social stigma involved in remaining childless.

In the event of a divorce, the wife can claim a share of the family's assets. The custody of the children of a divorced couple usually belongs solely to the woman. The father can obtain the custody of the children only if he is very influential or wealthy. A Japanese man married to a foreigner can keep custody of the children.

Health

Women have equal access to Japan's excellent network of healthcare facilities, so it is no surprise that the infant mortality rate in 2006 was 3 deaths per 1,000 live births and the maternal mortality rate for 2005 was 7.3 fatalities per 100,000 live births. These are among the lowest rates in the developed world.

Japanese women usually make healthcare decisions after consulting their spouses. In certain cases, the consent of the spouse or father is mandatory.

The use of the contraceptive pill as a mode of birth control was legalized only in the year 1999. Only 1.3 percent of

Japan's women aged between 15 and 49 use the pill as a contraceptive, and Japanese couples show a clear preference for non-medical contraceptive methods like condoms and withdrawal (76 percent and 21 percent respectively in 1997). For the period 1995 to 2003, 56 percent of adult women used birth control.

Interesting Social Customs

Traditional customs required upper-class married women to have three important features: a heavily powdered face, shaved eyebrows, and blackened teeth.

Women in Business

General View

Social traditions and constraints long inhibited women from playing an active role in Japan's economy, but that is no longer the case. About eighty percent of all women work (representing over 40 percent of the total Japanese workforce), although many work part-time or drop out from the workforce to take care of their children.

The government is actively trying to increase the level of participation of women in the workforce in response to the country's aging workforce and low birthrate. These efforts may have an impact on women's substantial under-representation in politics, the diplomatic corps, law, medicine, and the higher levels of private industry.

Legal Rights

According to Japan's Constitution, Japanese women are eligible for all the legal rights enjoyed by men. Women were given the right to vote in 1945, and women and children became eligible for their shares of the family property in 1946. Before then, the oldest son of a family was considered the sole heir to the family property. Women are also legally permitted to own businesses.

The Basic Law for a Gender-Equal Society (Law No. 78 of 1999) has prompted many government proposals designed to help women participate in the work force, like more flexible working hours and the elimination of age restrictions on employment.

The salary paid to full-time working women is approximately one-third less than that paid to men. In part-time work this gap shrinks to just 5 percent.

Women in Professions

Japanese working women are mostly employed in education (45 percent of all teachers), government (32 percent of low-level employees), manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and at restaurants and bars. Half of them are employed part-time, making up 78 percent of Japan's total part-time workforce.

Representation in the medical and legal professions is low (16 percent and 11 percent, respectively), but has been increasing to the point where half of all medical students are now female and a quarter of all candidates for bar exams are women. Women hold only two percent of senior government posts.

The overall percentage of women at the executive level in private business is only 14 percent (two percent as division managers, three percent as section managers, and eight percent as group managers), and only a few women are seated on boards of directors at major Japanese companies.

There are, however, several well-known female business owners and executives in Japan. A few popular examples are Sawako Noma, the president and CEO of Kodansha; Yoshiko Shinohara, the president of Tempstaff; Hiroko Wada, the president and COO of Toys "R" Us Japan; Merle Okawara, the new CEO of e-bay Japan; Fumiko Hayashi, the chairman and CEO of the supermarket chain Daiei; and Tomoyo Nonaka, the head of Sanyo Electric.

Studies indicate a slow but constant growth rate for Japanese women in business. The Japanese government has undertaken several efforts to increase the number of women in top-level posts in government and business.

State-sponsored childcare is available in Japan. Municipalities and private sources also fund kindergartens. Employed women can also use private or company-sponsored childcare centers.

Women as Business Owners

The number of women running their own businesses is generally low, but four out of five small business owners in Japan are women and a large number of the self-employed are also women. In Tokyo alone there are 7,000 businesses owned by women.

Fifty-six percent of female Japanese entrepreneurs are engaged in the agriculture sector, 14 percent in forestry,

and 17 percent in fisheries. Besides these three industries, Japanese businesswomen are involved in a diverse range of other sectors.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The Japanese generally find it uncomfortable to do business with women. Western women in high-level positions must establish their position of authority immediately.

The Japanese consider pants or a skirt, paired with a shirt that does not expose much skin, acceptable business attire. Wear low-heeled shoes that can be removed easily, because wearing high-heeled shoes may make women appear dominant over men. Casual attire is a strict no-no.

Business cards, called *meishi*, they play an integral role in business dealings. Take special care of the business cards that are given to you. Your cards should be printed both in your language and Japanese.

Japanese greet one another with a bow or a handshake and address each other by their surnames, not by their first names. They use titles for superiors, doctors, and politicians. One thing to remember during business negotiations with the Japanese is that they tend to answer in the affirmative to any question.

Jordan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Jordan is still a paternalistic society. Women are bound by the socio-cultural tradition of taking care of the family and children and have limited roles outside of the family.

Over the last few years, however, there has been a transformation in the roles of women in Jordan. The percentage of women at work has more than doubled over the last three decades (to about 28 percent in 2003), and women are increasingly taking part in economic activities that were earlier considered to be the domain of men, like IT and engineering. That said, most women have clerical, academic, medical, or administrative jobs, they earn less than half of what men earn on average, and their unemployment rates remain high compared to men. Women held only 5.5 percent of the seats in the lower legislative house in 2005, while the percent was 12.7 in the Senate or upper house. Less than 3 percent of Jordan's 608 judges were women in 2003.

Individualism and nuclear family structures have replaced the traditional structure of kinship and joint families. Other social changes include higher levels of education for girls, less chaperoning of women outside the house, later marriages, smaller age gaps between the wife and husband, and fewer children. Segregation of women and men in public places is, however, still common, and there is generally limited interaction between the sexes. Sons are also still given priority over daughters. Inheritances and citizenship are only passed through the father, despite a

decree passed by the queen in 2002 granting women equal rights to pass on their citizenship to their children.

Reportedly, two-thirds of all businesses in Jordan are run by women. These are mostly small and medium-scale, and only in specific sectors. Rural and lower-class urban women are much more economically active than their rich urban counterparts. These women work in the fields or other activities that contribute to the family's income, and this gives them some degree of financial freedom. Even though middle- and upper-class urban women are more educated and more likely to have a formal job, they are less likely to work in general. Recent changes in labor laws and regulations have made employment more attractive and favorable for women, so this situation may change.

Women are generally very conservative and traditional in their dress. Most wear a veil that covers their head and some cover their faces as well. Many young girls now wear Western-style clothing, although nothing too revealing. It is quite common for Jordanian women to drive by themselves.

Legal Rights

Jordanian laws give equal rights to women on all grounds. The practical reality for women is, however, much different, with women treated as inferior and denied access to their rights. For instance, women require the permission of the male members of their family to apply for a passport or to travel abroad.

Women were given the right to vote and to run for office in 1974. The first woman was appointed to parliament in 1989. They have also been granted a quota of 6 seats in the House of Representatives out of the total 110 seats.

This is, however, dependent on the approval of the council of ministers. Anyone can organize and participate in approved public gatherings and join political parties (Article 4 of the Political Parties Law). Women also enjoy the freedom of speech and expression in the media, subject to social and traditional norms.

Women's rights regarding some issues like domestic violence, adultery, divorce, custody, citizenship, and inheritance are inequitable. The law discriminates against the woman in cases of adultery by requiring documentary medical evidence to prove her innocence. The law also condones "honor crimes," thus protecting men from punishment for acts of violence against women. Women also face discrimination in relation to guardianship under *the Welaya* (Guardianship) system in Jordanian law despite the fact that Islamic legal principles allow a woman to be the guardian for her children.

Women have every right to approach courts as plaintiffs, witnesses, or experts, but are limited by social constraints. Their testimonies are also treated as equal to those of men's, except in Islamic *Shari'a* courts. Women have been granted the right to initiate divorce through legislation known as *Khul*. However, it is still very difficult for a Jordanian woman to initiate divorce in practice. Custody of the children upon divorce is granted only to men. A divorced woman is entitled to receive maintenance from her husband for food, housing, clothing, and medical care.

Women are allowed to own and manage property independently. They can enjoy their earnings and assets, although women generally contribute most of their salary towards the whole family's requirements. Inheritance differs according to personal status codes. In some cases, daughters inherit only half of what the sons inherit.

Every Jordanian citizen is entitled to seek employment on a par with his or her education level, but there are no laws that guarantee equal pay or equal employment opportunities. Women are also limited by social and legal restrictions from pursuing certain kinds of employment. Women cannot work in quarries or on night shifts between 8p.m. and 6p.m., with some exceptions. Sexual harassment is neither defined nor forbidden by Jordanian laws. Violation of women's labor laws or sexual harassment is reported either to the Working Women Department or the Family Protection Department.

Education

All Jordanian citizens from six to sixteen years of age are entitled to free, compulsory elementary education. Adult female literacy rate for ages 15 and above was about 86 percent in 2003, while the youth female literacy rate was 98.9 percent. The gross education enrollment of women is higher than that for men. Although there are separate schools for men and women, co-education is allowed in all schools at all levels.

Dating, Marriage and Family

The legal marriageable age is 18 years in Jordan, but people between 15 and 18 years of age can also obtain permission from the chief justice to marry. Elders in the family, usually the fathers, arrange marriages. Although marriage between cousins is very common, the boy and the girl do not meet until after engagement. The engagement binds the couple as in marriage. A divorce is required if the couple decides not to get married after the engagement.

The woman takes her husband's last name after marriage. She is expected to conceive sons, which gives her a better

social status than women who have only daughters. Permission from the court is required for a woman to marry a man who is older than her by twenty years or more.

Polygamy is legally allowed, but it requires a verification of the husband's financial ability to maintain more than one wife. A man can marry up to four women provided each of them is aware of the existence of the other wives. All the wives should be treated equally and should be placed in separate houses.

Men can easily divorce women without any reason through the *talaq* system. There is an *iddat* (waiting) period before the divorce is sanctioned. The wife is eligible for compensation and child support from the husband upon divorce. The woman has custody of young children until they reach puberty or until they are 9 years old (boys) or 11 years old (girls). The woman being divorced can also retain her dowry as well as the maintenance obtained during the *iddat*. It is complicated for a woman to initiate divorce, even under the recently introduced *Khula* procedure, by which the woman gives up all her marital rights.

Young men and women these days are increasingly changing the rules of marriage, including dating before marriage. The family structure is shifting from the traditional joint family to a more autonomous nuclear family.

Health

Women have good access to medical care in Jordan without any discrimination. Financial constraints, however, make them dependent on their male relatives for obtaining healthcare.

The use of contraceptives is on the increase in Jordan. Despite this, the birth rate remains very high at around seven children per household. Modern women have begun to make their own reproductive decisions, although there are some restrictions on their reproductive rights. Abortion is strictly prohibited except to save the life of the woman or to preserve her physical or mental health.

Women face discriminatory treatment from the Civil Service Ordinance, which does not provide women with all of the benefits that men enjoy, such as cost-of-living allowances and family allowances. Women are entitled to a ten-week leave during pregnancy, out of which six weeks should be taken after the child's birth. Childcare facilities are provided for children of working mothers, if the company employs more than 20 women. Other common benefits are paid feeding breaks during the first year or even a whole year of unpaid leave.

Interesting Social Customs

After a son is born in a Jordanian household, the father and mother are addressed by the son's name preceded by an "Abu" (father of) for the father and an "Om" (mother of) for the mother.

A rapist can avoid punishment if he marries the victim and saves her "honor."

Women in Business

General View

Jordanian women's participation in the economy has increased significantly over the last two decades, and, today, women are found in almost all sectors of the economy. Their participation in business is also on the

increase. In fact, studies show that women run two-thirds of the country's businesses.

During the country's stages of depression and economic reform, women's participation in the workforce was limited considerably; they had to quit their jobs in order to provide jobs for more men. Since the 1980s, many Jordanian men migrated to Gulf countries in search of employment, contributing to the fact that today's labor force contains such a significant portion of women. The majority of women work in teaching, clerical, administrative, and nursing positions.

Many NGOs and women's organizations help women through education, training, legal support, and financial aid to find productive employment or become independent owners of their businesses. Women are also increasingly taking up university, vocational, and/or technical training courses that will help them obtain better jobs.

Working women still have the additional responsibility of taking care of their house and children, but men are increasingly involved in household chores to help women balance work and family life. This transformation has led to other changes in the social life of Jordan including smaller families, later marriages, fewer children, and greater social freedom for women.

Legal Rights

Jordanian law guarantees equal rights to all citizens irrespective of gender. Women received the right to vote and to contest in elections in 1974. The first woman was appointed to parliament in 1989. However, women's representation in politics remains poor, with women holding just 5.5 percent of the seats in the lower house of the parliament in 2005.

Although women have the right to own and manage property, women actually own just 10 percent of land and property.

Women in Professions

Professional Jordanian women are active in academics, medicine, law, sales, and administration, but are rarely found in technical sectors. Women fill over 45 percent of public sector jobs. Their access to private sector jobs is limited by the lack of required education or experience, social norms for certain jobs, and the preference to male employees shown by employers. Participation in agriculture is low, although some women raise livestock and poultry and engage in dairy processing on a small scale.

Women are prohibited from taking up employment in quarries of phosphate and limestone due to their hazardous nature. They are also prevented from working between 8p.m. and 6a.m., although this is relaxed in some sectors like hotels, airports, restaurants, hospitals, tourism, and transportation, or in jobs that have yearly inventories or seasonal sales.

There are no specific dress codes for working women, but the most accepted dress covers the lower body to the knees or calves. Modesty is also required at the neckline and back of the dress. Sleeveless dresses, tight and short clothes like shorts or mini-skirts, or anything with see-through material are a strict no-no.

Women as Business Owners

The lack of jobs has encouraged women to take up self-employment and entrepreneurship, even if on a small

scale. Around 90 percent of all businesses are of small- or medium-scale in Jordan (most of them are family businesses), and the number of women owners is among the lowest of the Arab countries. Nevertheless, women own and manage a major portion of informal companies at a micro-enterprise level. These include small-scale home-based in sewing and dressmaking, beauty saloons, handicrafts manufacturers, food processors, carpet weavers, and traders (e.g., clothes, groceries).

There are not many prominent Jordanian businesswomen, but Arije Al-Amad, who works for the Micro-Fund for Women, is a visible proponent of helping other Jordanian women to become entrepreneurs. By 2004, she and her organization had granted 86,000 loans to about 33,000 Jordanian women. A typical case is that of a 25 year-old woman, who opened a kindergarten and nursery in her village after receiving a loan from the Development and Employment Fund. Her establishment now employs 9 women from her village and has over 100 students.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Jordanians treat visitors, especially foreign businesswomen, with respect. Visitors are expected to compliment the country, or at least show interest in the country, by asking questions about its history, government, culture, and language. Personal compliments also make up an important part of relationship-building. Also avoid controversial political topics like Israel and Palestine, Iraq, terrorism, the U.N., and U.S. foreign policy especially at the beginning of the relationship. Religion is one of the favorite subjects for locals, and some people may even try to convince you to taking up Islam. That said, avoid overt Christian evangelism. Women traveling alone should exercise caution. It is also not considered proper for women to sit beside the driver in a taxi.

Kazakhstan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Kazakhstan has a patriarchal society, and existing societal prejudices against women working outside of the home re-emerged after independence from the USSR. The changes in Kazakhstan's economy in its first decade as an independent country had a further negative impact on women, as state enterprises were downsized and day care centers were closed down.

The changes in the labor market since 2000, however, have caused a considerable improvement in the status of women. The buoyant market economy has led to an increase in women's involvement in small businesses (with a 40 percent increase in the number of women business owners), formal employment (40 percent of managers in private business are now female), and the public sector (where 57 percent of employees are female), as well as increasing women's access to higher education.

Even with this progress and with legal provisions intended to assist women, women rarely hold the top ranks in the public or private sectors and still have poor representation in politics. Women currently constitute 10 percent of the lower house of Parliament and 8 percent of the upper house or Senate. In the judiciary, however, women represent 60 percent of all judges.

The indigenous Kazakhs and Kazakhstan residents of European origin have different views regarding abortions, with the latter practicing higher levels of abortions.

Traditional women wear long-sleeved tunics while modern women wear shorter and more comfortable outfits like those worn by Russian women.

Legal Rights

Kazakh women received the right to vote in 1924. The Kazakhstan Constitution guarantees women equal rights with men in social, economic, and political areas, but in reality, social and traditional practices impede women from realizing many of their rights. For instance, Article 14 of the Constitution proclaims that women have equal rights in family law, in property law, and in the judicial system. Social pressure, however, restricts their ability to own and manage businesses or property.

Abortion is legal in Kazakhstan and, despite the increased use of contraceptives, abortion still remains part of Kazakhstan's birth-control practices. Women have the right to initiate divorces and generally receive the custody of their children.

Education

Legally, Kazakh women have equal access to education. The state has made education compulsory for both men and women through the secondary level. Kazakh women have a high literacy rate of 99.3 percent. Boys and girls study under the co-educational system sharing the same classroom space. Despite the significant presence of women in higher education, social prejudices generally relegate women to lower-paid jobs.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Marriages were traditionally considered a union of two families and were arranged with the help of brokers and agencies, but women in Kazakhstan now have the right to choose their partners. Kazakh women start dating in their teens and meet other young people in social gatherings, parties, or workplaces. The average marriage age for Kazakh women is 21, although some women marry in their late teens.

Upon marriage, women can retain their maiden name, choose their spouse's surname as a common family name, or combine the two surnames. After divorce, they retain their marital name or revert to their maiden name. Women can initiate divorces, although Kazakh laws are rather vague about their rights in such cases. In most cases, women get custody of the children.

Men, the traditional heads of the household, seldom help women in household responsibilities. Women often bear the twin burden of family and work. Childless women feel some stigma, as motherhood is highly valued in Kazakhstan.

Polygamy is practiced in the Southern areas and among certain top-echelon public officials, although it has no legal sanction.

Health

The Kazakhstan constitution assures women equal access to health care services. The mediocre health care system of Kazakhstan is plagued by endemic corruption and a lack of modern equipment; thus, the infant mortality rate is relatively high at 28.3 deaths per 1,000 live births, and the maternal mortality rate is an average of 80 deaths per 1,000 births. Rural women find it more difficult to make their own health care decisions and have little or no access to good health care facilities.

The unavailability of proper family planning methods and the high cost of contraceptives have led to a rise in abortions.

Interesting Social Customs

Some Kazakhs still practice the old custom of "stealing the bride" by an armed bridegroom or his male relatives. The kidnapped girl may or may not know the person who abducts them. Brides can be forced into such marriages by a kidnapper who rapes the girl who refuses to marry him.

Women in Business

General View

The budding market economy of Kazakhstan has increased women's involvement in businesses and provided women a more equal status with men in many fields. Moreover, the laws and policies that the government has advocated are enhancing women's professional development in line with their skills and initiatives. Women still find it difficult to reach the top positions in government and the private sector, however.

Legal Rights

The Kazakhstan constitution provides women protection against discrimination in all spheres and, under Article 14, women enjoy the same rights as men including family law, property law, and in the judicial system. However, traditional prejudices and social customs limit their rights in owning and managing businesses or property. The under-representation of women in senior posts in state enterprises has restricted women to low-paying menial jobs. The government statistics in 2004 reveal that women receive only 61.8 percent of men's salary.

Women in Professions

Women generally engage in traditional jobs like teachers, accountants, bank officers, secretaries, and government workers, but also play a key role in the fields of science and health care. Women also hold 40 percent of managerial posts in private businesses.

The majority of women find employment in the healthcare and social service sectors (82% out of the total number of workers), hotels and restaurants (77%), education (75%), and the financial sector (66%).

Some accomplished businesswomen in Kazakhstan include: Solovyova Aigul Sagadibekovna is the president of the company Bazalt Int., (Almaty, Kazakhstan), specializing in food processing; Omarova Mensulu Aukanovna runs the company Azamat-Kokshetau and the Globus Commercial Center (Kokshetau, Kazakhstan), which are engaged in the automobiles, oil, and cereals businesses; Rkhimbekova Saltanat Temirkulovna, serves as the general director of Arat (Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan), a manufacturer of agro-products; Sabyrkuul Asanova is the president of the Symbat Fashion Academy; and Gozel Kulzhanova owns the floral decoration company Gulistan.

Women do not have any prohibitions in professions, nor are there dress restrictions for Kazakh women. Instead of the traditional wide, long-sleeved tunics, women wear shorter and more comfortable outfits these days. Kazakhs living in cities wear city clothes like Russians and Tatars: fur-lined coats, *valenki* (traditional Russian winter footwear), and boots.

Mothers are the principal caretakers of children, and the government has many childcare centers and nurseries for working Kazakh women. The adult to child ratio of 1:6 in the nurseries demonstrates the importance given to childcare in Kazakhstan.

Women as Business Owners

About 40 percent of Kazakh women have their own businesses. Women generally run small or micro-enterprises that involve less capital and low risks. The high percentage of micro businesses and self employment mostly indicates the lack of other job opportunities.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Kazakhs generally follow European business customs, so they treat foreign businesswomen with respect and affability. Kazakhs customarily shake hands and call people by their first names at business meetings and social gatherings. Women should dress in a suit or business dress for meetings. After establishing good business contacts, business visitors can expect to be invited to informal meetings such as dinners and toasts,

as well as hunting excursions and barbecues. Kazakhs observe the practice of exchanging small gifts as a token of appreciation at the end of an initial meeting. Negotiations take a slow pace, so businesspeople need to remain patient and persistent in Kazakhstan.

Kenya

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Kenyan society has always considered women secondary to men, and societal pressures and even violence continue to restrict women's access to their economic, political, and social rights. Recently the government has introduced policies and development schemes for the emancipation of women, emphasizing education, health care, and family planning. The Commission on Poverty Eradication is also attempting to solve the larger issue of oppressive poverty, but its provisions suffer from a lack of legal and financial support.

Traditionally, Kenyan women were expected to assist men in agricultural activities and to take responsibility for all household chores, and this is true to this day. Many of them also run small side businesses related to agriculture and handicrafts in order to earn extra income. Building on this traditional source of financial security, the Kenya Women Finance Trust has provided loans and formal training in financial management to poor rural women to help them establish their own small-scale businesses. The Trust, which started in the 1980s, is managed by Kenyan professional women.

Women are highly marginalized in Kenyan politics and its judiciary, constituting only four percent of parliamentary officials and 18 percent of judges in the country.

Urban women have an edge over rural women in their access to education and job opportunities, and they are less subject to traditional attitudes and practices as well. Women of the Masai people, who are traditionally semi-nomadic cattle-herders, have traditionally preferred polygamous marriages. Masai people also consider having many children as a symbol of prosperity.

Traditional Kenyan women wear *kanga* (a long piece of cloth worn as a skirt or a shawl) and headscarves. Modern urban women typically wear Western outfits like suits, dresses, or shirts and trousers.

Legal Rights

Kenyan women were granted the right to vote and to stand for elections in 1963. The Kenyan Constitution guarantees women equal rights, but traditional practices and customs marginalize women's rights. Under property law, for instance, women have an equal right to own and inherit property, but women generally do not inherit anything from their parents. When a husband dies, the husband's family usually inherits his property, leaving the widow with a small or no portion of the estate. If the widow has a son, she becomes the guardian of the property of her son; sometimes traditional and social practices deprive women of even this right.

Legally, women can initiate divorces. Upon divorce, mothers get the custody of boys under seven years old and girls under fourteen years old. Although the custody goes back to fathers after this age, courts usually extend the period of custody, especially in the case of divorced Muslim mothers.

Kenyan laws prohibit abortions except when a pregnancy endangers the life of the mother.

Education

Kenya's National Development Plan decrees that all citizens have equal rights to compulsory basic education. Boys and girls study together under the coeducational system. Women, however, face discrimination in accessing educational facilities. The literacy rate for women is 79.7 percent, much lower than the men's literacy rate of 90.6 percent. A large number of Kenyan girls repeat grades or drop out of school for various reasons.

Although women have same job opportunities as men, they face discrimination in the workplace and chiefly occupy low-paid jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Generally, Kenyan women choose their own partners, and only a few marriages are arranged. Dating starts at about the age of 18, although it is less prevalent in rural areas. Women usually meet men in social gatherings or at the workplace.

The minimum legal age of marriage for women is 16 in Kenya, but they usually marry in their early twenties. Generally women take the name of their husbands upon marriage. Civil laws grant women the right to own and dispose of property, but traditional customs do not permit a woman to own land separate from her husband.

Despite legislation protecting them, Kenyan women are routinely expected to tolerate infidelity and domestic violence. Customary law also approves of polygamy, although its practice has been much reduced compared to the past.

Childless women feel stigmatized by society because of the cultural taboos associated with infertility. In some areas, a childless woman adopts a single woman capable of having children, or one who already has children, as her *iweto* wife and shares her with the husband so his family name can live on through the *iweto's* children.

Divorced women usually go back to their parents' home without any property or money. Legally, both parents have equal responsibility for children, but women usually receive the custody.

Health

Kenyan women have limited access to health care system. Poor health care facilities and some traditional customs have undermined women's health. In some ethnic groups in Northeastern Kenya, girls between eight and 13 years of age undergo female genital mutilation, which makes them susceptible to diseases and medical complications.

The abortion law permits abortions only when a mother's life is endangered. The high cost of abortions and lack of birth control methods has encouraged the practice of illegal abortions. This has resulted in high maternal and infant mortality rates. Statistics show an infant mortality rate of 59 deaths per 1,000 live births in Kenya.

Interesting Social Customs

In some ethnic groups in Kenya, a woman's marital status and the number of her children are symbolically revealed in her hairstyle.

Pokot and Masai women wear rows of beaded necklaces that elongate their necks. They follow this practice, as it reveals their marital and social standing in their societies.

Women in Business

General View

The patriarchal society of Kenya sets very high moral standards for women based on the traditional roles they are expected to play. These traditions have the effect of relegating women to subordinate status, confining them to menial tasks and discriminating against them in political and economic spheres.

In spite of the government policies, legislation and media promotion of women's rights, Kenyan women still find it difficult to overcome barriers to success.

The percentage of girls admitted to universities was 29 percent for girls and 71 percent for boys in the early 1990s. Substantial strides in higher education due to the opening of more new public and private universities, however, have given more women opportunity to acquire university education and training. The large numbers of women of the middle- and upper-classes who have been able to obtain education and employment overseas has also opened up more professional opportunities for Kenyan women as a whole; it may also help Kenya to one day be the vanguard in terms of bringing more opportunity to women in Africa.

Legal Rights

Women did not win the right to vote until 1963. The Law of Succession, which administers inheritance rights, provides for equal consideration of male and female children. Common practices, however, exclude women from inheritance settlements, especially married women, or they receive smaller shares than male beneficiaries. Moreover, a widow cannot solely own her husband's estate unless she has her children's consent.

Millions of women in sub-Saharan Africa are robbed or evicted, often by their own in-laws, because women are deemed unworthy of equal property rights. Kenyan women are no exception to this reality and often lose their homes, land, and other property due to discriminatory laws and customs.

The constitutional review process constitutes an important opportunity to do away with problematic provisions of the current constitution, which permits discrimination when it comes to customary and personal laws that affect women's property rights and have kept them in the position where they only hold about five percent of land titles.

Women constitute 75 percent of the agricultural work force and have become highly active in urban small businesses. Nevertheless, they earn only two thirds of a man's average monthly income. Women have difficulty moving into non-traditional fields, are promoted more slowly than men, and bear the brunt of layoffs.

Encouraging legal signs are that Kenya attained equal enrollment for men and women in law schools during the 1990s, and women have been appointed as high court judges and chief magistrates.

Women in Professions

Kenyan women actively involve themselves in traditional agriculture and agro-based businesses, particularly poultry farming. Over 70 percent of workers in the cut flower business, the second biggest agricultural exporter in the economy, are women. In the textile sector, they represent more than 75 percent of employees and in tourism more than a third of workers are women. They have also emerged in hand-made products and in the fisheries industry.

Kenyan professional women can be found in human resource management, accounting, and financial management. Prominent Kenyan women include the women behind the Kenya Women Finance Trust: founder Mary Okello, chairperson Charity Muya, and CEO Dr. Jennifer Rira. This organization has given out millions in small business loans to women with a 98 percent loan repayment rate over their 14-year history. Kenya's women marathon runners also serve as important role models: Catherine Ndereba, a world record holder in the marathon, has a husband who stays at home and looks after their daughter when she travels to compete; Lornah Kiplagat, used her winnings from racing to set up a training camp for young female and male runners that also helps them to secure an education. And, of course, Kenya's Wangari Maathai won the Nobel Peace Prize for her pioneering environmental work.

Kenyan women are not barred from any professions and there are no particular dress restrictions for Kenyan women. They dress formally for business occasions and otherwise they wear skirts, trousers, or other dresses.

Mothers usually provide the childcare, and in rural areas they tie their babies to their backs with a cloth sling even while they work. In urban areas, older siblings or other relatives look after the children of working mothers. The state grants childcare facilities and pre-primary education and runs these programs under the guidance of the local district government.

Women as Business Owners

Women have established themselves as business owners in the informal economy and own nearly half of all micro, small, and medium enterprises. Popular areas of activity include food production, processing, and marketing as well as garment manufacturing. Women also own small trading and service businesses, although the informal economy is the easiest for women to enter due to the low amount of capital required, which limits their risk of failure.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

In the male-dominated culture of Kenya, men do not immediately accept women as equal business partners. However, many Kenyan businesspeople have lived and worked abroad and are able to forge working relationships with foreign businesswomen. Foreign women should follow the custom of dressing discreetly and modestly. Kenyans commonly greet people with a handshake and they stand while making introductions. It is also considered polite to stand when a woman of equal or higher status enters a room for the first time. In some Kenyan homes, people remove their shoes before entering, especially in rainy seasons. Foreign businesswomen should be aware that widespread corruption in Kenya might affect their business dealings.

Kosovo

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Kosovar society is traditionally patriarchal with varying degrees of male dominance. The countryside, home to 60 percent of the population, is particularly conservative, and women there are expected to confine themselves to their households and children. Only 13 percent of Kosovar women have independent incomes, compared to 40 percent of men.

Kosovar women have, however, proved their mettle during times of war by assisting political leaders to organize health and educational centers, at great risk to their lives. Women's organizations, both international and local, continue their fight against the marginalization of Kosovar women.

Women have an insignificant representation in Kosovar politics, with only five women in leadership positions of their respective parties. A small number of women have found a niche in executive positions. In the judicial domain, 18 percent of judges, 13 percent of prosecutors, and 6 percent of licensed lawyers are female.

The life patterns of women in urban and rural areas differ widely. Data from the U.N. Interim Administration's Office of Gender Affairs showed that 30 percent of urban women were employed and only 20 percent of rural women were employed. Women in villages endure worse treatment because of their economic and educational shortcomings.

Women of the minority Serb community face a lot of economic restrictions. If they are employed, they have to confine themselves to areas under security surveillance. On the other hand, Roma women play a dynamic role in business, trade, and agriculture.

There are no dress restrictions for Kosovar women. Traditional attire is colorful and shows Greek, Balkan, Byzantine, Serbian, and Turkish influences. Urban women also wear modern Western clothing.

Legal Rights

The laws of Kosovo grant equal rights to men and women, but the implementation of these laws has not been effective as far as women are concerned.

Women have been able to vote since 1946. They also have the right to drive vehicles. Legally, women enjoy the right to inherit and possess land and property but in reality, it is the husbands or the brothers who usually take possession of the property. In rural areas, women often return to their family of birth if they become widows and forego all claims to their husband's property.

Abortion is legal in the early stages of pregnancy. Abortion is also allowed in the later stages when the woman's life is at stake.

Women do have the right to initiate divorce proceedings and the divorce rate is rising. In the event of divorce, the father usually gets custody of the children.

Education

The law endorses the right to equal education for all, but in rural areas, boys from large poor families are far more likely to be the ones to go to school. In 2004, the women's literacy rate was 91.3 percent compared to men's rate of 97.3 percent. Ninety percent of girls finish their primary education while 30 percent receive secondary education. Ten percent of girls drop out by the fifth grade and 50 percent by the ninth grade. Kosovo's economy is in a shambles, and women especially find the going tough in the scarce job market.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Parents have traditionally arranged marriages for their children, but European-style dating is becoming more common. Kosovar society attaches great importance to virginity, although only as far as girls are concerned.

The legal age for marriage is 18 in Kosovo. The average marriage age for women is 21, compared to men's marriage age of 25.

Polygamy is illegal under the former Yugoslav laws as well as the current interim Constitution. Islamic law permits polygamy but is not rigidly followed in Kosovo, where a moderate form of Islam is followed.

Women have the choice of taking their husband's name, retaining their own name, or adding their name to their husband's family name.

Men are in charge of the household in Kosovo: the husband heads the family in the case of nuclear families and the eldest male in the case of extended families. Kosovar society values children, but women who do not bear children do not carry any particular stigma.

Legally, both husband and wife have equal rights to custody of children, but in actual practice it is the husband who usually gets custody of children while the wife returns to her family of birth.

Women can legally own assets separate from their husbands. In reality, however, there is a great disparity in the ownership of property, with women owning less than 10 percent of all property.

Health

The few and inadequate health care services in Kosovo are run by private doctors or international organizations, and Kosovar women generally do not receive satisfactory medical care. There are a few programs and facilities for women-specific health care issues (such as sexually transmitted diseases), especially in the capital. The maternal mortality rate was high in 1999 at 509 for every 100,000 live births and the infant mortality rate was 35 per 1,000 births, the highest in Europe.

Women have a measure of power to make their own health care decisions, as Kosovar society has begun to recognize the need to involve women at decision-making levels in matters affecting health care. The Centre for the Protection of Women and Children, supplies contraceptives and family planning counseling to both urban and rural women, and the need for family planning is accepted by society at large.

Interesting Social Customs

The dowry or the bride-price is usually a huge sum demanded by the bride's family as a compensation for losing a household worker. The size of the payment is considered commensurate with the respect that the bride's new family will show her.

Women in Business

General View

Gender equality is still far from a reality in Kosovo. Women occupy 34.4 percent of positions in the business sector and 28.1 percent in the professions. They are best represented in finance/banking, public administration, and service sectors but are only nominally present as judges, prosecutors, lawyers, media professionals, doctors, teachers, and journalists. A whopping 69 percent of women in the work force are unemployed, and 60 percent of women workers work in unskilled jobs. In 2003, 156 women were unemployed for every 100 unemployed men. Rural regions present even more of an unbalanced picture with a mere 21 percent of women employed. Almost every woman who has finished secondary school is jobless in the countryside.

A relative denial of access to property ownership, absence of educational and professional opportunities, and hardships in obtaining financial assistance are the forces that hamper the economic self-sufficiency of Kosovo women.

Legal Rights

Kosovar women have equal legal rights with men to vote, to own businesses, and to inherit property. In the matter of inheritance, traditional customs take precedence over statutory laws, and women are often deprived of their legal share of family property. Kosovo women's lack of property ownership is the major reason for their lack of economic independence and inability to obtain commercial credit. Women, on average, earn only one quarter as much as men, according to a UN report.

Women in Professions

Many women work the textile industry. Teaching, medicine, and nursing are the most popular professions for Kosovar women. A sizeable number of girls possess technical qualifications and are pursuing careers in financial, economic, and engineering sectors. Business management, driving, and computer work serve as some of the other non-traditional segments in which Kosovar women have been showing a keen interest. Women have yet to make their presence fully felt in administration and management.

Prominent Kosovar women include Mechiha Santuri, who owns San Trade Co. in the textile and furniture businesses, and Sehri Heroi, owner of Linda Driving School, where three out of five employees are women.

Women on the whole contribute 34.4 percent of business activities, out of which 22.7 percent run their own enterprises. There is virtually no profession women cannot pursue, but they are advised against taking jobs in the chemical industry for health reasons, lest it may affect them during their pregnancy. Kosovar women have no formal dress code, but their outfits have an oriental touch, a mixture of what the peasants and herdsmen wear.

Generally, women dress very modestly and avoid garish clothes.

Working parents leave the toddlers in the kindergartens or with their grandparents. Once back from work, it is the responsibility of the women to look after their children. Just 7.8 percent families use professional daycare centers due to the cost involved and the distance from home. There is a dearth of state sponsored crèches in Kosovo, though women have expressed their need for it.

Women as Business Owners

The post-war scenario in Kosovo has left women limited opportunities. Women own six percent of registered businesses, and only three percent of women executives overall are decision-makers. Female representation is similarly low in the media and in legal professions (as lawyers, judges, and prosecutors). In the police division, however, there is a proportionate representation. Women-owned businesses offer secretarial services, personal services (like beauty salons), horticulture, tutoring, and computer trainers. The U.N. Office of Gender Affairs has promised economic revival of women in Kosovo.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The business ambience in Kosovo is congenial, and people are very sociable. The style of business runs similar to that of the U.S and the rest of Europe. A firm handshake is the way to get started, and it is the norm to greet women first. Consider it essential to greet everyone individually. Kosovo law forbids people from photographing their police or military posts. Do not set business appointments in the months of July and August, as many national holidays fall in these months.

Kuwait

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Kuwait's transformation from a small seafaring community to a major oil producer resulted in a rapid economic growth that created a demand for an educated workforce. This gave an impetus to women's progress, and the educated woman became a symbol of the modern state. The new generation discarded the traditional black veil, achieved higher education, and competed alongside men in the labor market. By the early nineties, Kuwaiti women made up one-third the workforce, with a vast majority employed in education, medicine, engineering, and law.

The position of Kuwaiti women is more dependent on their economic, rather than social, class. Most Kuwaitis are wealthy, and women from the upper economic classes usually have more freedom in taking up employment opportunities and participating in Kuwait's public life. Positive changes in the status of Kuwaiti women have occurred, but, despite the provision of legal equality, Kuwaiti society remains male-dominated. The societal roles of Kuwaiti women are circumscribed by their family roles as mothers, wives and daughters, and they still face discrimination in relation to personal status law, divorce, and inheritance.

Following legislative changes in 2005, women were appointed to the municipal council and senior nonpolitical positions, and, for the first time, the Prime Minister appointed two women as ministers and another as ambassador to the United Nations. In the judiciary, although women hold positions as investigative judges, they are not permitted to serve as judges in court, and no women serve as judges in the Supreme Court.

Women have traditionally been dominant in Kuwait's medical and healthcare sectors, with one-third of all doctors and a majority of other medical personnel being women. In the business sector, women are under-represented, although they are now encouraged to run their own businesses, and much progress has recently been made on this front.

Traditional Islamic tenets and customs govern rural women and prevent them from venturing out of the house to work or participating in other public activities. Their access to various employment and educational opportunities is also limited. Urban women, on the other hand, are quickly establishing themselves as a dominant force in many areas of society and serve as the driving force behind gender-equality changes. The position of women among various Kuwaiti ethnic tribes does not differ widely.

Kuwaiti women are free to wear modern clothes within the bounds of modesty.

Legal Rights

Women in Kuwait have many of the same rights as men, and the legislation urges State parties to adopt measures that grant equality to women and provide legal redress for any act of discrimination. Kuwaiti women gained full political, electoral, and voting rights in May, 2005. They

also have the right to own and inherit property as well as the right to drive. Inheritance laws do not hold true in a marriage between a non-Muslim and a Muslim unless the non-Muslim wife converts to Islam. Sunni and Shia inheritance laws differ.

Abortions in Kuwait are permitted under certain circumstances that include danger to the mother's life, physical or mental health, and in cases of severe fetal impairment. As for divorce legalities, Sunni laws make it easier for women to initiate divorce when compared to Shia laws. A divorce initiated by the wife cannot be revoked, and a Sunni woman can cite many grounds for divorce.

Education

The Constitution grants both genders equal access to education. The state provides school premises and human and material resources at the primary and intermediate stage under a free, compulsory system of education for males and females. The literacy rate stands at 90 percent for females and 93 percent for males. Classes at all universities are required by law to be single-sex. Most Kuwaiti girls complete their secondary levels of education after which many of them go on to complete their university degrees. A minority of them enroll in vocational institutes and other skills' development courses.

Educated Kuwaiti women are not confined to traditional 'female occupations' and take up diverse employments in the government and oil industry or with independent businesses. Women are represented in nearly every professional category and prominent senior-level positions. A proposal to incorporate women into all scientific and military fields in the Kuwait Army is being considered.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Islamic tenets prohibit interactions with the opposite sex outside the family, but changing societal and Western practices such as online dating services is undermining the role of the family as matchmaker. Dating among Kuwaiti youngsters is usually initiated at a restaurant or at malls and is based on mutual attraction. The usual dating routine involves exchanging telephone numbers and then phone calls.

Traditionally, most Kuwaiti girls were married off very early. These days, however, most young Kuwaiti women have careers, which have resulted in a majority of them postponing their marriage plans until they reach their early twenties. Traditionally, family arranges marriages in Kuwait, and women, regardless of their age, require their father's approval. Inter-marriage within clans takes place, but is rare between social classes. Polygamy, although legal, is more common among the tribal elements of the population, and a man has a legal right to marry up to four wives.

Marriage does not affect the Kuwaiti women's legal status or her financial assets, and women have full freedom to administer their assets, which includes contractual obligations, accessing of loans, and other legal and financial transactions. Women generally take the name of their husband's family after marriage and do not retain it in the event of a divorce. Kuwaiti women are usually

responsible for the day-to-day running of the household, although the husband still makes major decisions.

Children, particularly sons, raise a woman's status in society, and infertility carries a social stigma in Kuwaiti society. Custody issues of children after a divorce favor the mother in both Sunni and Shia laws. The law bars the custodial parent from leaving the country without the consent of the other parent.

Health

The state provides comprehensive maternal and child healthcare services free of charge to women through government-run hospitals and health centers located throughout the country. The efficacy of the state's healthcare system has resulted in the lowering of maternal and infant mortality rates (5 deaths per 100,000 live births and 9 deaths for every 1,000 live births respectively in 2005).

Women do not make their own healthcare decisions in Kuwait. For instance, women require the consent of the father or husband to obtain an abortion. However, Kuwaiti women do have access to contraceptives and counselling for family planning, provided free of cost in government health clinics.

Interesting Social Customs

One interesting aspect of Kuwait's social life is that a married man considers single men as a threat to his wife and daughters, which means they must be socially avoided. This means that even in all-male gatherings, groups are usually segregated into married and single males.

Women in Business

General View

Kuwaiti women enjoy a relatively high degree of freedom compared to women in most Gulf nations. They constitute a third of the workforce, and many hold prominent positions in education, medicine, science, government ministries, the oil industry, journalism, banking, and private businesses.

Kuwaiti men have traditionally been the providers and women the homemakers, but these traditional gender roles are changing as a result of influences from the outside world, including an influx of foreign women into the country and the large numbers of women obtaining higher education, often surpassing men in terms of their average participation in the technical and scientific subjects. The result has been a far greater impact from Kuwaiti women on their country's economy.

Legal Rights

Kuwaiti women were granted the right to vote and contest elections in 2005. The law also required female voters and candidates to follow the Islamic law while participating in political activities. The law provides equal pay for equal work, but gender-based segregation in pay remains in certain sectors.

Women who have attained the age of 21 years can initiate trade or business. A woman has the right to own and administer property. However, major differences between the Sunni and Shia inheritance laws do exist.

Women in Professions

In the recent past, Kuwaiti women were engaged only in teaching and nursing, but they're now increasingly found in other fields including law, medicine, science, and engineering. Women are especially visible in the banking, finance, and service sectors. Kuwaiti women have also achieved high-level posts in the government, including ministerial posts.

Now that gender equality is an established principle in the Kuwaiti Constitution, appointments and promotions to high-level positions are made impartially, and Kuwaiti women have come to occupy high-level positions in the public and private sectors. Women sit on the governing boards and also serve as chairpersons of various private and public sector enterprises such as banks, cooperative societies, oil corporations, and private businesses.

Successful businesswomen in Kuwait include Maha Al Ghunaim, vice chairman and managing director of Global Investment House and a prominent figure in the Arab banking world; Dr. Rola Dashti heads an international consultancy firm in Kuwait that focuses on privatization, managed all the contracts of the Kuwaiti government for the emergency and reconstruction program during the invasion and post-liberation period, and serves as an activist for gender equality and women's rights; Shaikha Khaled Al Bahar is deputy general manager of the National Bank of Kuwait and an awardee of the 1996 Gulf Business Award; and Fatma Al Bader is a former banker who now runs F.M.B. General Trading and Contracting Est., a company that trades in sports watches.

Kuwait's laws restrict women's employment in the military, police, army, diplomatic corps, and the administrative division of the judiciary. Women are also prohibited from night jobs except in private businesses and institutions that fall under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, such as pharmacies, hotels, airlines, and tourist offices.

There are no dress code restrictions for Kuwaiti women, although modest dressing is the rule, irrespective of whether the dressing style is Western or traditional Islamic.

As for children, working women depend on the extended family to help with childcare. Most families employ full-time, often live-in, maids. Many women's associations have opened model nurseries to provide childcare for working mothers.

Women as Business Owners

Women are increasingly successful as investors and as managers of their own businesses. Businesses owned by Kuwaiti women mostly focus on the service, trade, and retail sectors.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Female business visitors need to be accompanied by a male colleague on their first business meeting in Kuwait. Foreign businesspeople generally appoint a Kuwaiti representative or agent who mediates between the foreign business and government officials. Personal relationships and mutual trust play a big part in establishing a business relationship.

Women generally do not hail a cab from the road, as it may invite criticism. There have been a few instances of women passengers being harassed while doing so. It is recommended that one hire a cab from a known and reputable taxi company. Visitors should also keep in mind

that Kuwaiti men do not take kindly to comments about a man's spouse or grown daughters. Also avoid public displays of physical affection between sexes. Foreign

businesswomen should wait for a Kuwaiti businessman to offer his hand.

Kuwait is a dry country, where buying, selling, and consuming alcohol is totally prohibited.

Kyrgyzstan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Kyrgyzstan is a male-dominated country made up of nomadic tribes. The nomadic culture involves a lot of hard and tiresome chores, from milking the cows to looking after the children, mainly carried out by women. In spite of all this, a woman is expected to be under the control of her husband and all of his relatives. The only woman in a typical Kyrgyz household who is respected and obeyed by all the other members-including the men-is the mother of the house.

Sixty percent of women in Kyrgyzstan live in rural areas and lack education, awareness of birth control methods, and comfortable living conditions. The independence gained by Kyrgyzstan in 1991 has changed very little in the social and economic life of women. Women are exploited in their workplaces and have minimal access to health care. Few women are employed in jobs that match their educational qualifications.

The newly formed Parliament does not have a single female member. On the other hand, almost two-thirds of physicians and one-third of judges are women. Most women are small-scale entrepreneurs selling farm produce.

The women of Northern Kyrgyzstan are Westernized and wear revealing clothes like shorts, short skirts, and halter tops, but most Kyrgyz women wear a dress with wide trousers. Young women tend to wear red-colored dresses, while older women wear clothes of darker colors.

Legal Rights

According to the Constitution of 1993, men and women are given equal rights. Women can exercise their voting rights and also drive cars. Men are usually favored in matters of inheritance despite the existence of laws to prevent discrimination against women.

Abortion is legal (up to the twenty-eighth week of pregnancy) when there is risk to the mother's life or health; the unborn child has a serious hereditary disease; the mother's husband dies, divorces her, or is imprisoned while she is pregnant; the woman has more than five children; or the pregnancy is the result of rape.

Kyrgyzstani women have the right to initiate divorce proceedings, and both parents have equal rights to child custody.

Education

Girls have equal opportunities in all levels of education, but many young girls do not complete their education due to poverty and the revival of many pre-Soviet traditions like early marriages and seclusion. Overall, the literacy rate for Kyrgyz women is 98 percent. Educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan are generally coeducational.

Kyrgyz women are highly active in the job market. They constitute the majority of the workforce in public health and social insurance (71 percent), education and the arts (57 percent), trade and catering (54 percent), communications (52 percent), and information services (50 percent). They also represent 47 percent of the workforce in agriculture, 40 percent in industry, 19 percent in construction, and 11 percent in transport.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages were common in the old days, but people choose their own life partners now. The legal age for marriage is 18, but it can be lowered with the permission of parents. Polygamy is illegal, but many affluent Kyrgyzstani men practice *de facto* polygamy.

Women are free to use their maiden names after marriage, and they have the legal right to own properties separate from their husbands. Property acquired during marriage belongs to both spouses.

Infertility in women is looked down upon and many childless women have been subjected to constant and acute verbal and physical abuse. Divorce can be initiated at the request of either party. Both the mother and the father have equal rights to custody of children in case of a divorce.

Health

Kyrgyz women have an average of 3.2 children and are entitled to free health care services provided by the government. These services have been enhanced in recent years by a substantial increase in the number of gynecologists and midwives. The infant mortality rate is high at 76.5 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Traditional attitudes prevent women from making their own healthcare decisions with regard to childbearing and contraception. Family planning is mainly practiced in urban areas where people can receive information about reproductive health and contraceptive use. Abortions are legal and the rate of abortion is relatively high, at 22.4 abortions per 1,000 women, similar to that of other former Soviet states. Failure to use contraception is the reason for almost half of unwanted pregnancies that result in abortion, and the failure of contraceptive devices is responsible for another 22 percent of cases.

Marriage and Family Centers at the Kyrgyz Scientific Research Institute of Obstetrics and Pediatrics provide medical abortions and advanced services like artificial insemination and treatment of gynecological diseases.

Interesting Social Customs

A woman becomes the property of her husband's brother after he dies, and a widower is likewise expected to marry one of his wife's younger sisters.

A form of elopement called *ala kuchu* exists in Kyrgyzstan, where a man grabs his willing girlfriend off the street and runs away with her. Many men consider this easier than courtship and less expensive than paying a dowry. More than 50 percent of married Kyrgyz women have been married this way. Unfortunately, this tactic is sometimes practiced on unwilling girls, who are abducted and forced to marry their abductors.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Kyrgyzstani society exhibits male dominance in business and politics. Business negotiations usually take a long time, as Kyrgyzstani people spend much time in small talk before any deals. Visitors should remain tolerant and patient towards the relaxed attitude towards time. Since Kyrgyzstani people very much love to socialize, guests can expect dinner invitations to their homes.

Women in Business

General View

Kyrgyzstani women tend to have a lesser status than men in society due to a degree of gender-bias in the Muslim majority society. During the Soviet socialist era, Kyrgyzstani women achieved a measure of equality with men. The collapse of the Soviet Union, however, and the political and economic turmoil since that time have placed women in a difficult position in the emerging market economy.

Legal Rights

Kyrgyzstan constitution provides women equal rights under family law, property law, and in the judicial system. In practice, discrimination persists due to the patriarchal attitudes of the society. Women have equal voting rights and can vote at the age of 18.

Women in traditional households generally have access to land and property, but the abandonment, divorce, or death of a spouse endangers women's entitlement to property. This is due to the fact that customary law dictates that men own the immovable property, while women own the movable property within the house.

Women earn significantly less than men, and UNICEF reveals that female monthly wages made 71.5 percent of male monthly wages in 1997.

Women in Professions

A large number of Kyrgyzstan women actively engage in agriculture. They are also active in education, health care, trade, and catering. They have less representation in business and politics, an arena dominated by men.

Prominent women include Canan Uz, who runs the medium-sized consumer goods enterprise ATA Ltd.; Usubalieva Lira Kaiupovna, manager of the large Emperor credit union; and Vugubaeva Roza Beishekeevna, head of the Temir Tuu credit union.

Labor law prohibits women from doing "harmful" types of jobs. It also forbids pregnant women from working overtime or working at night. As for attire, Kyrgyzstani women usually dress conservatively and modestly. In terms of children, working women usually seek the help of other female family members for childcare. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many state-run daycare centers have been closed, and the trend is still continuing.

Women as Business Owners

Kyrgyzstani women are eager to work in their home farms and also wish to become entrepreneurs starting and running their own businesses. Women business owners are mainly engaged in poultry, cattle breeding, dairy farming, bakery, glass, the garment business, retailing, catering, and community services.

Laos

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The women of Laos, one of the few remaining Communist countries in the world, have yet to achieve full equality with men. The problems of Lao women were first formally addressed by the new Communist government in 1975. The government's efforts aimed to achieve gender equality in economic, cultural, and social areas and to eliminate all discrimination and oppression against women. Despite these promises, little progress has been made on achieving parity with men, particularly in the area of social status and political participation.

Economically, however, some progress has been made over the past two decades. Women's role in the country's economic development has expanded to the point where they compose 60 percent of the labor force in the agricultural sector, 60 percent in the handicraft sector, and 50 percent in the commerce, public health, and educational sectors. Women are also fairly well represented in business. In the legislature, women made up 6 percent of the membership in the lower house and 22 percent in the upper house in 2005.

Laotian women in the Southern lowlands benefit from matrilineal traditions that pass the family home and land to the daughters in the family. When sons marry in the South, they are expected to move out of their parents' home and into their bride's home; this is called a "matrilocal" system. Northern Laos, however, follows a patrilineal tradition, so the country's real estate is split between men and women.

The perception of women as weak and inferior is deeply engrained in society and in women themselves. Women in matrilineal and matrilocal groups in the South enjoy a higher social status than women in the patrilinear groups. *Lao Lum* women, an ethnic majority, appear to have a better educational level, better access to transport and employment, and a better social status than other groups. The *Khmu*, on the other hand, are poor, less educated, and have fewer opportunities of employment. *Hmong* women have to bow to clan authority and have no decisional or advisory powers.

The government has recently weighed in with The Development Plan for Lao Women, aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination, raising educational levels of women, and improving resources for women's development.

There are no dress restrictions, and women wear both traditional dress and diverse attire, including modern clothing in the cities.

Legal Rights

The Lao constitution recognizes full equality of women, and Laotian women have had the right to vote since 1958. They also have equal rights to inheritance, particularly in the matrilineal groups. Among patrilineal highlanders, sons inherit house and land, while daughters receive a substantial dowry. Jewelry and woven cloth are passed on to the daughters.

A significant issue in the inheritance of land is the fact that many women don't realize that their name can be added to their husband's name on a land title to ensure that the land will pass to the wife. A larger issue is that men, in general, are tasked with dealing with people outside of the local community and therefore tend to make all major contractual agreements for the family. The relatively recent Family and Inheritance Laws attempt to address these issues.

Women have the right to drive vehicles and, in fact, the number of Lao women who drive motorcycles and cars equals that of men.

Women do not have the right to an abortion in Laos and many cross the border into Thailand for the procedure. Divorce, rather rare in Laos, can be initiated by either of the spouses, and child custody is granted to either parent. If a husband and wife cannot agree on custody, the court decides which parent should have custody after considering the children's interests.

Education

Even though the government enshrined the principle of compulsory primary education in the 1991 Constitution, the law has not been fully implemented due to the uncertain economic situation. Lao women generally receive less education than men. The literacy rate for females (aged 15 and above) was 60.9 percent in 2003, compared to the male rate of 77 percent.

There were less than 1,200 women with diploma-level high technical training (in communications, transport, irrigation, architecture, electronics, forestry, agriculture, law, and business administration) in 1997-98, compared to more than 3,700 men with the same training. There were, however, 1,361 women with university degrees in the disciplines of medicine, humanities, and science, compared to 1,811 men with university degrees during the same period.

Classrooms are shared between students of both genders in Laos.

Lao women are not allowed to become Buddhist nuns and generally do not have the same opportunities as men because of their lower educational levels and higher domestic responsibilities.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Lao men and women have considerable freedom to choose a partner or spouse. Cousins are sometimes the preferred choice. Often parental input is necessary, particularly among patrilineal groups. The *Hmongs* sometimes practice "marriage by capture," in which the man and his friends take the woman from her home by force.

During the dating period, a man would typically have to pay a visit to the girl's parents as a gesture of respect and take a brother or sister along as chaperone. Even in arranged marriages, men have to seek parental consent to court their future wives. If the woman refuses her arranged husband, the man's family is disgraced.

Early marriage and pregnancy are common in rural Laos, and most adolescent women marry and bear children when they are 16 to 17 years of age (their husbands are

typically a year or two older). In the more urban areas, the average age of marriage is slightly higher at 17 to 18 years of age. Prevailing norms require a woman to bear a child every year during her reproductive period, and childlessness carries a definite social stigma. Polygamy is widely practiced, and men purchase very young girls who are made to live with the man's family until they reach reproductive maturity.

Men are heads of household in the matters of religion, business, and politics. Women have the right to hold assets separate from their husbands, if they were acquired before marriage. As regards matrimonial property, both spouses have equal rights, irrespective of who acquired it.

Women generally take their husband's name after marriage, and her name is further transformed after the birth of the child. *Hmong* women, however, continue to use their father's clan-name even after marriage.

Health

Assessments reveal that young women rarely attend prenatal care services due to a lack of awareness. There is also little information available to young people in rural areas on sexual and reproductive health, and this is reflected in the high level of ignorance about the risks associated with early childbirth, unprotected sex, and sexually transmitted diseases. Women use oral contraceptives and/or condoms purchased from drug stores or itinerant peddlers.

The infant mortality rate is quite high (82 per 1,000 live births) as is the maternal mortality rate (500 per 100,000 live births).

Interesting Social Customs

The Baci (pronounced "baa-see") is a unique pre-Buddhist Lao custom with animist origins. This ceremony celebrates major life events such as marriages, births, achievements, arrivals, and farewells. It is performed by an esteemed elder and is credited with spreading peace and harmony to the individual and community.

Women in Business

General View

Traditional Theravada Buddhist beliefs discourage Lao men from pursuing any kind of entrepreneurship. This religious conditioning and the long period of Communist rule has hindered economic growth in Laos, but has led to women occupying a prominent role in business. Lao women are mostly self-employed and concentrated in the informal sector. Many women operate stalls in markets selling a wide variety of things or running small eateries. Lao women also engage in black market money exchange (at lower than official exchange rates), and they offer the convenience of exchanging money after banking hours.

Women are burdened with financial and domestic responsibilities and receive little consideration from men. Ironically, this inferior position is regarded as 'natural' by a great majority of Lao women. Educated Lao women, however, are dissatisfied with the *status quo* and are eager to pursue the numerous opportunities for Lao women arising from the increased foreign interest in their economy.

Legal Rights

Lao women received the right to vote in 1957, ten years after men were given that right. The Laotian constitution accords full equality to women, but reality is far from the constitution. Women generally do inherit their family's property equally with male relatives. Among certain Laotian communities, the inheritance passes to sons, and daughters receive substantial dowries. Among other Laotian ethnic groups, there is a custom of the youngest daughter receiving the main family house. Not much official data exists on pay differences among men and women, but according to one report on road construction and maintenance workers, women received equal pay with men. According to another report, women in management positions received only half the salaries of male managers.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, women have been engaged in farming alongside of men. Agriculture still makes up the large sector of the Laotian economy, accounting for 60 percent of GDP, and women form 60 percent of the active labor force in agriculture. Women tend to specialize in weeding, bringing the grain to market, and tending small animals (chickens and pigs). Silk weaving on handlooms is another popular form of employment for women. Women also run around 63 percent of businesses in the informal sector and the private sector.

Few Laotian women leaders appear in the public sector: Bouachanh Syhanath is head of the Lao Women's Union (LWU); Chanthum Latmany heads the LWU Department of Development; Vatsady Khotyotha is the director of the LWU Department of Mass Media; and Chansavath Bopha heads the Department of Geology in the Ministry of Industry.

There are no barred professions for women, but the law prohibits heavy manual labor or jobs involving long periods of continuous standing during pregnancy. Laotian women also have no dress code restrictions with regards to the workplace, and any modest attire is appropriate.

Older siblings usually care for children of working mothers. The Early Childhood Care and Education program, a sub sector of the education system, provides nursery care (for children three months to two years old) and kindergarten (for children three to five years old).

Women as Business Owners

Lao women have a significantly higher percentage of female ownership of micro/small enterprises and dominate the commercial sector in garment/textile production and food processing, where the female-to-male ownership ratio is 2:1. As business leaders and managers, however, women are poorly represented. An estimate of The National Chamber of Commerce and Industry estimates women in senior management positions at 11 percent, with salaries only half of those of male managers.

Women's businesses contribute about half of the family income. A program called "Promoting Women in Economic Development and Poverty Alleviation" has been established to strengthen women's vocational skills, access to income generating loans, and awareness of legal rights.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Laotians treat foreign businesswomen the same way they treat men.

Laotians are reserved and the visitor is expected to maintain a similar distance until a closer association is established. Excellent linguists that they are, Laotians are

highly pleased when foreigners speak their language. Conservative dress codes are appropriate for foreigners, although wearing the *sin* (Laotian skirt) for social occasions would be considered a sign of cultural respect. Laotians frown upon women smokers, as people tend to associate smoking with loose morals.

Latvia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Latvian women have a high level of autonomy, financial self-reliance, and social support, making them some of the most independent women in the world. Both before and after Latvia's independence in 1990, women enjoyed all legal rights in education, employment, and family matters. Some 57 percent of women between 15 and 64 years old are employed full-time, while another 11 percent are employed in part-time jobs. Women work very hard, with an average of 46 hours per week spent at work and another 29 hours spent on household tasks (versus 51 hours and 16 hours for men).

Education has been the key to the advancement of Latvian women. In recent years the number of women enrolling in higher education has increased to the point where the proportion of women is now higher than men at the university level.

Politically, Latvian women are also very advanced. In fact, the President of the Republic, the foreign minister, the Chair (President) of the Parliament, and the Minister of Culture are all women. In January 2000, there were 20 female parliamentary members, including three party leaders. Women are also well represented in local government with 29.5 percent of leadership positions in towns and 41.2 percent in civil parishes.

Women actively take part in the business arena with about 58 percent female administrators at the managerial level in 1998. Women also headed 22.1 percent of financial institutions and banks in 1999.

In the legal field, there are approximately 71 percent women judges in lower courts, 64 percent in regional courts, and 47 percent in the Supreme Court. There are as many women prosecutors and lawyers as there are men in these positions. The media is another field where women find employment, as journalists, editors, and departmental directors. They are also directors of commercial radio and TV stations like Star FM and LNT. Other common professions for women are medicine (with a great number of female doctors), education (as professors, researchers, lecturers, and assistants), or as members of non-governmental organizations.

Rural women are engaged in factories, small industries (like handicrafts), cattle breeding, healthcare, education, and public services. Most private farms are owned by men who run them with assistance from their wives. As many farms are non-mechanized, these women put in a lot of hard work, as they also have to take care of the house and children. Rural women are slowly becoming

farm entrepreneurs, but they are limited by lack of resources. For this reason, many rural educated women migrate to urban areas in search of employment.

Latvian women are conservative in their dress, avoiding bright colors like red or blue. Knitted wool garments are popular. There are many variations of ethnic wear in Latvia, but traditional costumes are only worn on special occasions like festivals.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of Latvia provides equal rights to all its citizens. Women have the right to vote and to run for elected offices. A variety of other laws, like the property law and family law, protect Latvian women.

Women have reproductive rights, including the right to have an abortion under the following conditions: to save the life of the woman; to preserve her physical or mental health; if the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest; or if there is fetal impairment.

Women are entitled to maternity leave of two months before and after delivery, with an option to remain at home at half-pay for up to two years.

Education

Everyone in Latvia is entitled to receive education under the 1991 Education Law. Some 98.9 percent of children attend school, and their level of school attendance is high at 99.2 percent. Non-attendance is, however, on the rise, especially in the rural areas. The female adult literacy rate among ages 15 and above was 99.7 percent in 2003, the same as men, and the female youth literacy rate (age 15-24) was 99.8 percent.

Women enroll in higher proportions than men at all levels of education.

Among European Union countries, Latvia ranks third in the number of female PhD graduates. They are mostly in sectors like engineering and technology, natural sciences, agricultural sciences, medical sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Latvia also has the highest number of female researchers among European Union countries.

Women are equally represented in almost all sectors of employment while they represent a higher proportion in some sectors like education, health and social services, hospitality, financial services, and trade. They are poorly represented in utility services, construction, transport, and communication. The proportion of a woman's wages to a man's wages in 1998 was 79 percent.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Latvian women are free to date and choose their life partners. Young people generally meet in colleges, during social or religious events, or through online dating and dating agencies. The legal marriageable age for everyone is 18 years, although parents or custodians can permit their wards to marry as early as 16. The average marriage age is around 25 years old for women and 27 years old for men. Inter-ethnic marriages are also becoming common.

The number of divorces has increased over the years, and so has the incidence of cohabitation. Polygamy is legally and socially prohibited.

Traditionally, a woman moves to her husband's house after marriage. Both the partners have a right over their individual properties and can decide whether to keep it joint or separate.

Under Article 86, women can keep their surname or take their husband's name after marriage. They can also retain both the names.

Being a homemaker remains the primary responsibility of a Latvian woman, who is also considered responsible for maintaining traditional family customs. Childlessness has a certain stigma attached to it, despite the relatively low number of children and the increasing number of abortions among Latvian women.

Latvia has one of the world's highest divorce rates with over 60 percent of marriages ending in divorce. Custody of children can be retained by either parent and is determined by the court if the partners do not reach an agreement. The wishes of the children are also taken into consideration, provided they are over seven years of age. Alimony can be 25 percent, 33 percent, or 50 percent of the income, with both parents having equal responsibility towards child support under Family Law.

Health

Women enjoy good healthcare facilities in Latvia. Pregnancy and post-delivery examinations are provided free of cost. Private health services are also abundantly available. Most women receive prenatal examinations, and women give birth under the supervision of trained personnel. Rural women face some difficulties, as the local hospitals in villages are not well equipped. Sometimes, they have to travel long distances to towns for better treatment. There is, however, no gender discrimination in healthcare services.

Women have the right to make health care decisions and have access to birth control methods. Fertility rates among Latvian women are very low, at around 1.3 children per woman. This has prompted the government to take up programs like the "Population of Latvia and People's Health" for increasing the birth rate. The government is also encouraging artificial fertilization to tackle infertility.

Contraception is used more by women than by men, with higher incidence in urban areas. Despite the high level of contraception use, the number of abortions is also high in Latvia, as abortion is used as one kind of birth control for family planning. In 1998, there were 108 abortions for every 100 births. The maternal mortality rate is higher than that of Western Europe but lower than that of other former Soviet states.

Women in Business

General View

Women play an important and influential part of Latvian society. They are the binding force of the family and the torch bearers of societal traditions. Latvian men have had a great respect for gender equality, and women have always been highly regarded in business and politics. The high concentration of young or very young women in positions of power is a testimony to women's empowerment in Latvia, as is the fact that the president of Latvia is a woman.

In 1999, the Government of Latvia decided to provide credits for the projects of the Small and Medium Enterprise program. To augment this, in 2004, Hansabank and Hipoteku Bank received a credit line to support a program for businesswomen, and 4 million euro were loaned to women business owners to start new businesses or to grow existing businesses.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of the Latvian Republic has laws against gender discrimination and accords equality to both genders in the issues of education and labor. Latvia is also a signatory of international conventions that guarantee equal rights for men and women. Despite the inherent gender equality of the Latvian society and its progressive laws, there is a pay differential of 30 percent in favor of men.

In 1918, Latvian women were granted the right to vote. They can also own property, work, and participate in all spheres of public and private life. The constitution prohibits any kind of heavy labor except as relief work.

Women in Professions

Low-paying occupations like teaching, nursing, and cultural preservation comprise the bulk of Latvian women's professional employment. Rural women are employed in manufacturing, handicrafts, health care, public services, education, cattle breeding, and the agricultural sector.

According to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, in 2003, the percentage of women in top managerial positions in the private sector was 3 percent compared to 5 percent of men, making women quite well-represented in management with 38 percent of all top posts. Women had a lower representation in the upper strata of administration in the public sector and in Parliament (12 percent).

Latvia has its share of female entrepreneurs who have made a mark in the business world: Inga Laganovskaia, import/export manager for NOOK, Ltd., a saw blade production company; Ingrida Bluma chairs the board of JSC Hansabanka in Latvia; Vija Glzere is director and co-owner of the accounting company, Glazeru; Nataja Sterhova serves as general director of Sun Gate; Iveta Galja is head of the News Department for Radio SWH; and Lita Šmīdia is board member and owner of SIA "Scool Express."

There aren't any barred professions or dress code restrictions for Latvian women, but the Labor Code prohibits women from working under hard and hazardous working conditions. It also stipulates that pregnant and breast-feeding women, as well as women with children under 3 years of age or handicapped children, should not be involved in overtime or nighttime work.

On the home front, women serve as the traditional homemakers, and they spend nearly twice as much time on housework as do men. Grandparents play an important part in childcare. Early retirement for women until recently allowed grandmothers to provide childcare while the mothers worked. Latvians regard childcare as a private concern and, as a consequence, public childcare is almost negligible.

Women as Business Owners

In Latvia, women have represented a third of all owners in business and agriculture, but, in the last few years, women have made forays into entrepreneurial activities in a big way. Business launched by women fall mainly into agricultural and agro-based sectors, dairy farming, pig breeding, grain production, textiles, milk processing, drinks, fish processing, and meat processing. A few women have also ventured into medium-sized

businesses in the costume industry, fisheries, and chemical and drug processing.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Latvian men are known for their chivalry and their good manners. Visiting businesswomen can, therefore, count on men to accommodate requests for meetings, introductions, or other forms of assistance.

A letter of introduction from a mutually respected colleague is a good way to convince Latvian businessmen of the seriousness of your visit. It is customary to exchange business cards upon introduction and to shake hands before and after a meeting, although a kiss on the cheek and a slight embrace is well within the realm of standard business protocol. In terms of the dress code for foreign businesswomen, the attire should not make too loud a fashion statement.

Lebanon

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women play a subordinate role in Lebanon's patriarchal society, with limited freedom to make decisions about education, employment, marriage, or children. The oldest male family member makes decisions, while most women take care of household chores and children. A woman's religious affiliation is more important than her social or economic class in determining her rights and privileges.

Better higher education standards, legal support, and some changes in patriarchal laws have allowed more women to become economically active. Women participate in fields like law, medicine, and business to some extent. There were 68 women judges out of the total 364 in 2000, while women held six out of 35 administrative and Supreme Court positions. In spite of cultural barriers, women do participate in politics, though there are very few women in leadership positions. In October 2005, a woman took a cabinet seat for the first time. The 128-member parliament had five women members at last count. Recently, women had two ministerial, two ambassadorial, and two mayoral positions. There were also three female director-generals. Many women work in family businesses, but women in high-level management or executive positions are almost unknown.

Most Lebanese live in urban areas. The women in rural areas are less likely to be educated, and as a result more of them live in poverty. Rural women are also more bound by traditional roles.

There are no laws regarding women's clothes. Lebanese women wear European style clothing, though Muslims often wear a chador or other covering in public.

Legal Rights

The Lebanese Constitution grants equal political and civil rights to men and women. However, the law does not explicitly prohibit gender discrimination.

Lebanese women have had the right to vote and to stand for election since 1952. Women are allowed to drive in Lebanon, and women over 18 years of age can own and manage property. However, the Lebanese state can't legally interfere in family matters, which means that in inheritance, religious law takes precedence, sometimes putting women at a disadvantage. For example, under Islamic religious codes, a son receives two parts of an estate for each part a daughter receives.

Abortions are allowed only as a last resort to save the woman's life. Dissemination of abortion-related information or selling abortion materials is banned.

It is difficult for a woman to initiate divorce in Lebanon. Divorce is not allowed at all in some Christian courts, while others require proof of adultery or abuse. A Muslim man can usually divorce his wife easily without giving any reason, while a Muslim woman who does not have husband's agreement must often spend years in court and have substantial evidence against him to get a divorce. Other variations in religious code exist. Whether or not a woman can get custody of her children after divorce is determined by religious laws, which vary widely but generally do not favor women.

Education

The adult female literacy rate was 81 percent in 2004 compared to the male literacy rate of 92.4 percent. Women have right to free and compulsory elementary education provided by the government but are often limited by social or religious constraints, especially in rural areas and within some particularly religious communities. Both coed and single-sex schools are available. Nearly half of all university students are women.

The labor law prohibits gender discrimination in terms of salary, type of work, promotion and progress, training opportunities, professional rehabilitation, dress code, and work benefits like compensation for children. A woman cannot be terminated during her maternity leave, or after the fifth month of pregnancy.

Women make up 29 percent of the total labor force. One-fourth of them work in professional sectors. About 90 percent of bank employees and 81 percent of service sector employees are female. However, women are rarely found in managerial or executive positions.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Dating is not acceptable in traditional communities, and for the most part parents or family elders arrange marriages for young people. In urban areas, young people from more liberal backgrounds do sometimes date and choose their own mates. When women are permitted to date, they generally start in their late teens or early twenties. The average marriage age is increasing among urban youth.

When marriages are arranged, the couple normally meets for the first time under the supervision of family when negotiations are nearly complete. Marriages between cousins or close relations are common in some communities but are prohibited in others. In communities where dating is acceptable, young people normally meet at school or through family or friends. Many types of inter-religious marriages are banned, though those contracted outside Lebanon are legal. Marriages are always religious ceremonies in Lebanon, though civil marriages performed outside the country are recognized.

The legal ages for marriage are 18 for men and 17 for women, and lower with a guardian's permission. Minimum and average ages for first marriages vary dramatically from religion to religion. On average, rural women marry in their late teens, while urban women tend to marry later.

Polygamy is legal in Muslim communities, though it is rarely practiced in Lebanon today. Women usually take their husband's surname after marriage.

Though women have certain say in family matters, men tend to be the decision-makers. Children are very important, and infertility can be a reason for divorce.

In divorce, child custody rules vary from religion to religion. For Muslims, women are allowed custody only of very young children, with variations depending on the religious sect. For others, the courts decide custody.

Women over 18 can own and manage property obtained before marriage separately from their husbands, as long as their religion does not have any rules to the contrary.

Health

Lebanese women have access to healthcare services provided by a number of private medical centers, as well as state-run clinics that offer free or discounted services. Women also have access to family planning centers and community health clinics. Women in government jobs receive medical coverage, including hospital allowances and family coverage, if they are single or have dependent husbands.

Most pregnant women receive prenatal and postnatal care, but the number of women accessing prenatal care dropped in the 1990s because of rising costs. Most recent estimates show that 89 percent of women give birth attended by a skilled medical practitioner. The maternal mortality rate is 128 per 100,000, and infant mortality rate is 23.7 per 1,000. Due to the high incidence of marriage between close relatives—the highest in the world—genetic disease is common and affects children's rates of survival as well as their overall health.

Women are allowed to make their own healthcare decisions, but those in conservative communities often have to rely on their husbands' or parents' approval. Contraceptive use was once banned in Lebanon, but the government is now encouraging family planning and contraceptive use. About 61 percent of married women of childbearing age use some form of contraceptive.

Interesting Social Customs

In the rural areas, menstruating women are considered unlucky to the people and things around them, and are sometimes kept in seclusion.

Women in Business

General View

Lebanese law provides women equal rights to participate in all spheres of public life, but women only constitute 25 percent of the total workforce and are generally confined to occupations like secretarial work, education (where they make up the majority of teachers), and public administration (where they have a big minority presence).

The country has witnessed a marked improvement in women's participation in other economic areas, but traditional values place them at a distinct disadvantage. Lebanese women are making progress in removing their social impediments and assuming more significant roles in the business environment, but this is happening slowly.

Legal Rights

In 1952, the Lebanese Constitution granted women the right to vote and the right to run for office. Women, however, require proof of education in order to vote and also face other cultural barriers to participating in politics.

Legislation provides women and men equal rights with regard to ownership of property, access to loans and banking facilities, and inheritance. However, even though women can own property, they often concede this right to male relatives for cultural reasons or because of family pressure. Due to discrimination, an expensive and difficult registration process, and rural women's ignorance of their rights, few women have land registered in their names.

Women employees receive lower pay than their male counterparts. Women farm workers, for instance, earn only half the wages of men. They also receive lower pay in the food-processing industries.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Lebanese women have taken charge of seeding, harvesting, and processing in agriculture. They also engage in conventional female jobs such as secretaries and schoolteachers. Many women have entered the political, artistic, and literary spheres, especially in the major cities.

Some well-known Lebanese businesswomen include: Hnanan Saab, the owner and general manager of Pharmamed; Najwa Grace Tohme, the assistant general manager of Al Rifai Roastery; and Majida Shahine, who runs cement and concrete plants.

Women are barred from many professions in Lebanon. They are prohibited from working in underground mines and quarries; working in industrial ovens for melting, refining and preparing metal products; the production of

explosives; making alcohol and alcoholic drinks; and tanning and flaying animals. Women are also prohibited from working at night in certain industries.

Lebanese Christian women have similarities to Western women in dress, attitude, and activities. Most Muslim women have a conservative attitude and dress more discreetly than their Christian counterparts.

Mothers have the primary responsibility for childcare, and grandparents or members of the extended family help in infant care for women who have occupations outside the house. Private kindergartens and babysitters have also become more common.

Women as Business Owners

A large number of Lebanese women are involved in entrepreneurial activities. Lebanese women tend to run businesses selling consumer and domestic goods, and they are less actively involved in the service sector. They also own businesses in food processing, jewelry, construction, and textiles.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Lebanese respect foreign businesswomen and treat them well. A lot of business is done through middlemen, so take care to choose the right one. Visiting businesswomen should dress impeccably. Lebanese often invite foreigners home for dinner. Foreign women should avoid traveling alone in Lebanon.

Lesotho

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Lesotho is a unique blend of conservative and modern practices, traditional and statutory laws. However, the role and status of women remains inferior to men in Basotho society (the culture of 99 percent of the people of Lesotho). Although Basotho women play significant roles in all sectors of society and experience increasing financial independence, traditional laws consider women minors under the protection of fathers or brothers before marriage, husbands after marriage, and elder sons on the death of the spouse.

Basotho women are generally susceptible to domestic violence and unsafe sex, as customary laws consider these acts as acceptable on the part of husbands. Girls and women have no rights to own land or property, and most poverty often drives them to early marriage or prostitution. Basotho women of the upper classes, however, have comparatively better access to education, health, and other benefits than those of the lower echelons of society.

With the formation of the Law Reform Commission and the new ministry of Environment, Gender, and Youth Affairs, the Lesotho government is achieving considerable progress in advocating gender equality and amending the laws that discriminate against women. Women's rights organizations have also taken various steps to educate women about their customary and legal rights and have encouraged them to take active participation in public life.

Basotho women have become much better represented in the various professions and businesses over the last few years. The speaker and 15 members of the 120-seat National Assembly, 12 of the 33-member Senate, five government ministers, and one assistant minister are women. In the first post-independence local government elections in 2005, women occupied 53 percent of seats. There are four women judges in the High Court, and the commissioner of police is also a woman.

Nearly 80 percent of Lesotho's population is rural, and agriculture represents the main occupation for both men

and women. Due to the increasing male migration to urban areas, rural women have to bear the double burden of farm work and family responsibilities. Female workers comprise 90 percent of the employees in the textile and manufacturing industry, and there are also a significant number of women in the health, social, retail, and service sectors. Statistics also show that women in Lesotho run 75 percent of cottage enterprises (relating to domestic and agriculture activities).

Women are generally suppressed by men in the homogenous Basotho (or Sotho) ethnic group. The remaining one percent population is European or Asian and gender-bias is less pronounced among this group.

Generally, Basotho women dress modestly in Western-style clothing, often with a *mokorotlo* or *molianyeo* (a traditional straw hat). Rural women usually cover themselves with elegant blankets for warmth in the evenings.

Legal Rights

Under the civil code, Basotho women have the same legal rights as men, but the customary laws prevailing over the statutory laws in most areas prevent women from realizing their rights. Basotho women have had the right to vote and run for elected office since 1965.

Women are considered minors and they do not have the right to inherit or own property or enter into legal contract or employment without the sanction of their husbands. Under customary law, the eldest son inherits all the property and is responsible for his mother and younger siblings (considered his dependents). Abortion laws are based on Roman-Dutch common law and forbid termination of a pregnancy except when it endangers the pregnant woman's life.

Basotho women have both the legal and customary right to initiate divorces, but the custody of children is usually granted to fathers.

Education

Lesotho offers free and compulsory primary education to all children and a large proportion of girls and boys attend secondary schools. Basotho women's literacy rate is 94.5

percent, which is 20 percent higher than the men's rate. Women are enrolled at all levels of schooling at higher rates than men, although the drop-out rate for boys and girls is high due to poverty and male cattle-herding traditions. Lesotho has a coeducational system where boys and girls share the same classroom.

Basotho women generally have equal job opportunities in all sectors, but they rarely occupy well-paid senior positions.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, the bride's parents arranged marriages in Lesotho, although contemporary women have the freedom to choose their partners. Western-style dating is not practiced in Lesotho, but men and women meet through social activities. The legal marriageable age is 21 years without parental consent, but the median age at first marriage was 19.7 for women and 23.9 for men in 2001.

Polygamy is still not legally prohibited, and many wealthy Basotho people practice polygamous marriages. The traditional practices restrict Basotho women from owning property separate from their husbands. Generally, Basotho women do not take their husbands' name upon marriage, but they are given a new name by the in-laws. Brothers or male members of a deceased man's family typically "inherit" his widow and children. Women take the responsibility of household chores and child rearing, while men provide for the economic needs of the family.

In case of a divorce, a wife returns to her maiden home and comes under the guardianship of her father. When a wife is indicted, her family has to pay back *bohali* (bride price). The custody of children is usually awarded to the father as the customary laws regard women as minors. As for women who are childless, the social stigma attached to infertility makes these women feel excluded from society.

Health

Lesotho's primary health scheme guarantees women equal access to medical services. Lesotho has a network of hospitals, clinics, and health centers run by the Ministry of Health with the help of various NGOs and private agencies. However, early marriages, women's vulnerability to AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and the lack of staff and modern equipment have resulted in high maternal and infant mortality rates of 762 deaths per 100,000 live births and 87 deaths per 1,000 live births, respectively.

Basothowomen do not have right to make their own healthcare decisions. The Ministry of Health, the Private Health Association of Lesotho, and the Lesotho Planned Parenthood Association provide family planning services, but the inadequate supply of birth control methods and cultural taboos restrict women from using contraceptives.

Interesting Social Customs

Basotho people legalize all customary marriages with the payment of *lobola* (bride money). The payment of *lobola* symbolically meant the transfer of reproductive rights of the women to her husband. When the brides' families do not receive *lobola*, they have all rights to dissolve the marriage and dispute the custody of children.

Women in Business

General View

Lesotho is experiencing a remarkable transformation in female economic participation, with women now occupying 90 percent of jobs in the garment and textile sector and 62 percent of professional and technology-related jobs in the formal sector. A large number of women are also involved in small-scale businesses.

Young rural women are migrating to urban centers for industrial jobs, which have helped to improve their social status. The large-scale migration of many men to work in South African mines has opened up opportunities for women, but men continue to dominate the top managerial positions in public and private sectors.

Legal Rights

Lesotho gave women the right to vote and to run for elected office in 1965. The Lesotho Constitution guarantees equal rights to women in all spheres, but customary laws often prevent women from exercising their rights. Although statutory law grants women equal inheritance and property rights, for instance, traditional practices do not allow women to inherit property or land, thereby restricting their access to credit and cooperative membership. Similarly, Basotho women cannot independently own a business and, if married, they require the permission of their husbands to get a job, enter into a legal contract, or engage in commercial activity.

The law accords equal remuneration for work of equal value, equal retirement benefits, and similar working conditions for both sexes, but in reality, gender inequality prevails. Women's rights organizations are helping the women of Lesotho to become more aware of their legal and social rights.

Women in Professions

Almost 86 percent of Lesotho's labor force is involved in subsistence agriculture, and Basotho women play the dominant role in this sector. Women are also engaged in textile production, manufacturing, academia, health care, retail, and the service sector. Although Basotho women generally have higher educational qualifications than men, they rarely hold top-managerial posts in organizations, and are hired for lower or middle-level positions.

A few well-known women of Lesotho are 'Mamokhali Makhutla, the manager of Lesotho Cooperative Handicrafts, a marketing outlet for handicrafts cooperatives in rural areas; Anna 'Mone, the owner and manager of Anna's Dress Making, traditional Basotho and ladies' fashionwear makers; and Alixe Malikeleli Mokokoane, the president and project manager of the Lesotho Homemakers Association, who was involved in teaching young girls and boys methods of survival (cooking, handicrafts, and human and animal nutrition and hygiene).

Women run nearly three-fourths of the cottage enterprises in Lesotho, and female participation in other economic activities is rapidly growing.

Mothers are the primary care providers for their children, and working women depend on female members of the extended family for childcare. They may also send their children to public or private pre-schools and day-care centers.

Women as Business Owners

Many Basotho women are active entrepreneurs in small-scale businesses. Women are mostly involved in businesses related to domestic and traditional activities such as agricultural products, beer brewing, dairy farms, cattle rearing and food production. Women run six out of the seven mohair-weaving companies in Lesotho. However, inadequate access to credit, business counseling, and industrial training makes the growth of a larger business difficult for Basotho women.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Generally, Basotho people are very friendly and hospitable, but women still play a subservient role in their

society. Foreign businesswomen may therefore experience some impediments when dealing with local businessmen.

English is the most widely used language for business meetings. Basotho people follow the usual business protocols, although they have a relaxed attitude towards time and speed.

Foreign businesswomen should dress modestly in light business suits or dresses and behave discreetly. Foreign visitors should take necessary precautionary measures, as criminal incidents are common in Lesotho.

Liberia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

More than a decade of civil war in Liberia devastated the country and caused immense suffering, including rape, mutilation, and murder, for the country's women. Even though many women remain displaced and homeless, Liberian women have been resilient and are at the forefront of creating the present climate of peace.

In traditional patriarchal Liberian society, men were considered the heads of the family while women occupied an inferior status, except during times of war when women became the family bread-winners. Rural women were, and remain, primarily engaged in subsistence farming and marketing farm produce. Educated urban Liberian women had more diverse opportunities, and many pursued professional careers as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and administrators.

In the current transitional period, many Liberian women and girls are still in dire straits due to poverty, the lack of jobs, and the difficulty of getting an education. With the election of Ellen Johnson as the president of Liberia (also the first African woman president), however, the winds of change have begun to blow in women's affairs. Women members now constitute 14 percent of the total cabinet and 5 percent of the total legislative seats. The government has also recently allowed the recruitment of women for the armed forces, a first for Africa.

The position of women in Liberia is largely dependent on social and economic class. Urban women have more access to education and job opportunities than rural women. Rural women generally assume a subordinate role in both public and private life. Women of certain indigenous ethnic groups (as opposed to the dominant Americo-Liberian minority) complain of discrimination in education, access to government jobs, and infrastructure.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for Liberian women. Their dress style ranges from traditional African to modern Western dress.

Legal Rights

Legally, women do not enjoy the same rights as men. Women in Liberia have the right to vote, and Liberian law states that women can inherit land and property, receive equal pay for equal work, and own or manage their own businesses. As a practical matter, however, these rights are rarely enforced.

Liberian law permits an abortion if it is performed to save the life of the woman or to preserve her mental or physical health.

Liberian women have the legal right to initiate divorce proceedings and obtain custody of children, but this applies only in the case of marriages under the civil law. In traditional (tribal) marriages, women are considered the property of their husbands and are denied custody of children in the event of a divorce.

Education

In Liberia, women have fewer opportunities for education than men. As a result, the literacy rate for females is only about 39 percent, less than half of the male literacy rate of approximately 80 percent. Schools in Liberia are coeducational.

There have been reports that some girls in Liberian schools, colleges, and universities are sexually exploited by their male teachers in exchange for obtaining grades, passing a course, or receiving a degree.

Since men in Liberia have more access to education and training facilities than women, they have better opportunities to obtain high-income jobs than educated women.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Parents or relatives traditionally arrange marriages for their children at an early age. Parents often use the marriages of their daughters as an occasion to improve their financial situation, since the groom has to pay "bride money" to the bride's family at the time of the marriage.

The legal age for marriage is 18 for girls and 21 for men. Many parents, however, marry off their daughters at ages 12 to 15, often for monetary gain. Most Liberian women take their husband's name after marriage.

Traditionally, dating was not practiced in Liberia. Increasing Westernization among the urban youth and the advent of online dating services have, however, increased the prevalence of dating activities. Girls also meet boys in schools, colleges, and at social functions.

In Liberia, women do all the domestic chores and take care of their families and children while men play decision-making roles. Liberian society does not particularly stigmatize childless women. In fact, it has been found that women without children are more successful professionally.

Although polygamy is prohibited under Liberian law, traditional law allows a Liberian to have more than one wife. If a woman is married according to tribal law, then she is not entitled to any of her deceased husband's property without permission from his family.

In a marriage conducted under civil law, women have equal rights with men in matters of divorce and custody of children. Many marriages, however, are traditional (tribal) and the husband or the husband's family has the rights over children.

In 2003, the government passed legislation legalizing women's marriage rights, rights to property, and access to children after divorce or widowhood, irrespective of whether the marriage was customary or statutory. How effective this law will be in practice remains to be seen.

Health

According to some estimates, only about 19 percent of the total Liberian population has access to proper healthcare facilities. The health and nutritional indicators of Liberia are among the worst in the world. Pregnant women are the most affected, as there are no trained midwives or proper hospitals for delivery in most parts of the country. The infant mortality rate in Liberia in 2005 was 156 deaths per 1,000 live births, one of the highest in the world. The maternal mortality rate in the year 2000 was 760 per 100,000 live births.

Family planning services are provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Family Planning Association. Contraceptives are provided to women irrespective of their marital status, but their usage is quite low. The government of Liberia permits abortion if the continuation of pregnancy affects the life or the mental and physical health of the woman.

Interesting Social Customs

In Liberia, traditional practices such as "Sande Society" and early marriages are common. The Sande Society prepares young girls for marriage. This training, given by women cultural elders, takes three years to complete and often interferes with girls' formal education.

Many Liberian girls are also subjected to the practice of female genital mutilation.

Women in Business

General View

Liberian women work outside the home mainly in subsistence agriculture and the informal sector. Years of brutal civil war have disrupted and impaired the social and economic life of Liberian women.

The ideologies of male dominance prevalent in Liberian society have also placed women in an inferior position and limited their advancement. Moreover, high female illiteracy levels inhibit women's access to resources and improved technologies.

despite all this, many Liberian women have achieved high positions in government and the private sector (including the first elected female head of state in Africa), and attitudes regarding women's role in the family, society, and the economy are slowly changing.

Legal Rights

The Liberian Constitution granted women the right to vote in 1946. Liberian law provides women the right to inherit land and property, to receive equal pay for equal work, and to own and manage businesses. Only women married under the civil law are entitled to inherit their husband's property. Those marrying under traditional laws do not have the right to inherit their husband's property or to retain custody of their children if their husbands die.

Women earn less than men for doing the same job. Even though Liberian law permits women to go on maternity leave at a certain period of pregnancy, employers in both private and public sectors usually ignore this provision.

Women in Professions

Women generally find employment in subsistence agriculture as producers, distributors, and sellers of food. They also have a largesense in the informal sector.

Many Liberian women occupy important positions in the government and the private sector. They serve as ministers, senators, representatives, lawyers, Chief Justices, corporate executives, doctors, educational administrators, and the nation's president (Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf).

Some examples of well-known Liberian women are Theresa Leigh-Sherman, the founding member of the Mano River Women's Peace Network, the head of the women and children's delegation to the Accra Peace talks in Liberia, and signatory to the Comprehensive Peace Accord on behalf of Liberia; Elizabeth Mulbah, advisor to the National Chairman on Health and Social Welfare for the transitional government; Amelia A. Ward, the former vice standard bearer for the Liberian party in the 2005 elections and former Deputy Minister of Economic Planning; and Vabah Kazaku Gayflor, head of Liberia's Ministry of Gender and Development.

Women are not barred from any professions in Liberia. Recently, the government began recruiting women for the Liberian armed forces, which was a first for Africa.

There is no dress code restriction for Liberian women. They wear all kinds of clothes from the traditional to the modern.

The children of working women are usually looked after by other family members. Human Rights Watch has recommended the construction of childcare centers in Liberia, as there are no government-run childcare centers in the country.

Women as Business Owners

Liberian women own small micro-enterprises in the agricultural sector and in the trading of fresh produce, textiles, and household articles. Women dominate

informal sector business activities with 33 percent of female-headed households involved in the informal economy versus 18 percent of male-headed households.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

In the male-dominated society of Liberia, the majority of men consider women subordinate to them. That said,

foreign businesswomen should have no trouble conducting business in Liberia if they are cautious and show deference to local sensitivities. Business visitors should take necessary safety precautions, as the country is in turmoil and there is always the possibility of looting and violence. Women should dress discreetly to avoid attracting unwanted attention from men.

Libya

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Libyan women are still bound by traditions and religious values that keep them at a social and economic disadvantage. Although there have been several governmental and legal reforms to uplift the status of women, progress has been very slow over the last few years, with the dominant Bedouin tribes acting as bottlenecks to the implementation of many social programs.

Women in Libya are still primarily responsible for looking after the home and family, and men remain the breadwinners and heads of households, responsible for all important decisions on behalf of everyone in the family. Furthermore, a woman has to obey the rules set by the patriarchal head of the family. She cannot report any mistreatment to anyone outside the family for fear of being considered disloyal and cut off from the family.

Over the last two decades, however, increasing urbanization and a loosening of patriarchal restrictions in Libyan society have contributed greatly to the changes in the culture. Women have been increasingly taking up higher education and pursuing careers in direct competition with men. In fact, today women are seen in prominent positions as lawyers, public prosecutors, and judges. They are, however, greatly under-represented in politics, public policy, engineering, and medicine.

There are also some differences in the perception of women within different subcultures, sometimes reflected in the manner of their dress. Young Arab urban women are more modern and take to Western mannerisms and modes of dressing. Among the Berber ethnic group, women are secluded from the outside world. In the *Tuareg* community, women enjoy greater status and even pass inheritance along the female line.

Although women generally dress traditionally, Western style clothing (nothing revealing) is also seen among educated urban women.

Legal Rights

Libyan women were given total equality under a Constitutional Proclamation in 1969. Libyan women received the right to vote in 1964, when they were also granted the right to run for elected office.

Women have the right to own and manage private property and land. They can also obtain loans, mortgages, and other credit. However, *Shari'a*, the Islamic code of law derived from the Koran, is used to decide matters relating to divorce, inheritance, and

property, and it overtly discriminates against women. For example, a woman has to take her husband's, father's, or any male relative's advice before taking up any legal course of action despite her legal rights provided by the Constitution.

Except for the *Tuareg* community, Libyan women face discrimination in inheritance laws, which state that they can inherit only half of what their brothers inherit.

Women have to be escorted by a male relative when they travel abroad, and if they travel alone, they still need the permission of their menfolk. While traveling within Libya, women face difficulties in finding proper accommodation, because hotels do not rent rooms to unaccompanied women.

Abortions are generally illegal and are strictly governed by the Penal Code of 1953. They can be performed only to save the life of the pregnant woman.

It can be quite difficult for a Libyan woman to initiate divorce against her husband, particularly when compared to the man's simple procedure of repeating the words *talaq* ("I divorce thee") three times in front of witnesses. If the woman has been found to be responsible for the divorce, she is denied any outstanding dowry payment (*mehar*) and forfeits custody of her children. The divorced mother gets custody of her children only if the divorce is by mutual agreement.

Education

The number of women pursuing education, especially higher education, has been on the rise over the last few years. About half of women have a secondary school certificate, and 32 percent of women between ages 20 and 24 are enrolled in college. This is a marked improvement since 2001, when only 6 percent of the total female workforce had a university degree. In another sign of improvement, the adult female literacy rate is only 71 percent, but the youth female literacy rate is 94 percent.

Girls and boys share same classrooms until they are around 10 years of age, after which they are segregated.

The Consolidation of Freedoms Law 20 (1991) gives women the freedom to choose their area of work. Today, we find women holding high positions in many fields. Women were allowed to join the traffic police force only in 2003. They are also being encouraged to join the armed forces.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Typically, Libyan parents or other adults in the family arrange marriages. Although urban people are making the shift towards "love" marriages, arranged marriages still remain the norm.

Young people are technically not allowed to date in Libya, but the advent of the Internet has spawned many online dating services that allow Libyan boys and girls to “meet” online. The minimum legal marriageable age for women is 20 years old, although it is quite common to see girls getting married in their teens with judicial permission.

Women retain their father’s surname and can hold independent assets even after marriage. Men are in charge of the households, while women are responsible for household chores and taking care of the children.

Children are very important assets in the family. Childlessness can be a cause of divorce or polygamy, which is permitted but no longer widely practiced. A woman can initiate a divorce, but only with some difficulty. She may get custody of the children if the divorce is based on mutual agreement. She is also entitled to maintenance and child support.

Health

The standard of healthcare is low in Libya compared to Europe, but far better than in its sub-Saharan neighbors. Public health facilities include 22 specialist centers, 17 general hospitals, and many village hospitals and community clinics that provide a wide range of healthcare services for women. The infant mortality rate is 26 per 1,000 live births, and the maternal mortality rate is 220 per 100,000 births.

The male head of the family makes the healthcare decisions for the women. Educated, urban women are, however, increasingly exercising the right to make their own reproductive decisions. Family planning does not receive much government support, and abortion is illegal in Libya. Contraceptive services are limited in availability.

Interesting Social Customs

Women are dominant in the minority *Tuareg* ethnic community (*Sunni* Muslims with indigenous magical practices) and enjoy higher status than men. Inheritance is through the female line and, curiously, it is the men who wear veils instead of the women.

Women in Business

General View

Although Libyan women enjoy equal access to education, health care, the law, and business, Libyan women’s participation in the labor force has taken over three decades to reach the current level of 22 percent. Furthermore, the prevailing gender stereotypes dictate that women should only occupy jobs in teaching, administration, nursing, government, and the service sector. Women are poorly represented in important sectors like politics, the judiciary, and government service and are just beginning to enter areas like banking, technical services, and engineering. New laws relating to equal pay for equal work, better working conditions, and greater benefits for married women have helped more women to seek employment.

Legal Rights

The 1969 New Constitutional Declaration grants women equal rights, including the right to vote and to run for election. Women can legally buy or sell property at their will, but they can’t obtain housing loans without the

permission of their husbands. Shari’a laws still dictate issues like marriage, inheritance, and property.

There is no legislation to protect women from sexual harassment in the workplace, despite laws that guarantee equal pay for equal work, women’s wages are substantially lower than men’s wages.

Women in Professions

In Libya, rural women usually take part in agricultural activities and weaving rugs and carpets. Urban women work as teachers, nurses, and secretaries.

Cultural barriers and Islamic prejudices impede women from holding high positions in companies, where women constitute only two percent of directors or assistant directors and 0.5 percent of managers. One prominent businesswoman, however, is Ibtisam Bin Amer, an advisor to the Oea Women’s Club, who was ranked 28th among the 50 most powerful Arab businesswomen by *Forbes* magazine.

Women are prohibited from working at night or engaging in risky jobs that involve heavy work. They are not, however, barred from entering into the military services or working as traffic police. Libyan working women usually dress modestly in long skirts and tops which cover their elbows.

In order to increase women’s participation in the labor force after marriage and childbirth, the government provides facilities including free day-care centers.

Women as Business Owners

Most Libyan women entrepreneurs run businesses related to agriculture, traditional cottage industries (food processing, knitting, and sewing), or the service sector (particularly in education and health). They usually run small-scale industries because of social pressures and the lack of funds.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The conservatism prevalent in Libya does not favor women in business, and foreign businesswomen may experience some difficulties in their business visits. All foreign businesspeople should respect hierarchy and use people’s titles.

Visiting women should dress modestly and discreetly. Although meetings are formal, one can expect a lot of interruptions. Business negotiations usually take a long time, so always have a flexible schedule. Never make appointments on Fridays or during the month of Ramadan.

Remember that Libya has a poor communication infrastructure, so choose couriers, fax, and email for correspondence. Corresponding in Arabic is preferred.

The Libyan culture expects women to congregate separately at social gatherings. Visitors should take precautionary safety measures, as incidents of theft and other crimes are frequent.

Lithuania

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Lithuanian women make up more than half the population and play an active role in the economy and society. Employment rates have been increasing since the 1990s, as a result of economic changes and the need to supplement family incomes. In fact, more women work in Lithuania than in the rest of the European Union. Jobs tend to be in the traditional "female" spheres of the economy such as healthcare, education, and the service sector, resulting in the underemployment of many educated women.

Women have traditionally been active in Parliament and local government (the first Lithuanian Parliament was chaired by a woman), but in the post-Soviet era, women's participation in political life and public administration has decreased considerably. They are a minority in the lower house (11 percent of seats), the ministries (23 percent of ministers), and at municipal levels (21 percent of municipal council seats).

Rural women have limited access to salaried jobs, free healthcare services, and social and cultural opportunities. This problem is particularly acute among older women, who constitute a large proportion of the rural population. Rural women are also underrepresented in business, and the reduction in government subsidy to agriculture has further increased their unemployment and forced many to accept state social benefits.

Lithuanian women do not face any particular dress code restrictions. They generally dress formally and modestly in business settings and otherwise wear casual clothing like jeans and sneakers.

Legal Rights

Women in Lithuania obtained full political rights in 1918 and have equal legal status with men. Lithuanian women have the right to own and inherit property, the right to reproductive choice, and the right to protection from gender discrimination.

Women can initiate divorces, and property acquired during marriage is considered joint property, even if only one holds the title or one party is unemployed. The family legal code specifies that both parents have equal rights and responsibilities toward their children, even after divorce. Mothers receive custody in most cases, and fathers typically receive visitation rights and provide child support.

Education

The trend of higher education among women is similar for both urban and rural women, although urban women have a slight edge. The female literacy rate is over 99 percent, on a par with the male literacy rate. Boys outnumber girls at the primary school level and in vocational schools, but girls dominate at the upper secondary level, in colleges, and in post-graduate studies (where over 50 percent of doctoral students are women). Schools in Lithuania are coeducational.

Although women's opportunities in the job market have increased, they still occupy the lower rungs of the occupational ladder and their average gross salary is 81 percent of that of men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Lithuanian men and women have the right to choose their life partners. They begin dating in their teens. Schools, universities, social gatherings, and online dating agencies are some of the places where women meet men. Women generally marry in their early twenties, but this age is increasing in tandem with women's levels of education and employment. The Marriage and Family Code grants women the right to adopt their husbands' surnames or retain their maiden names after marriage and after divorce.

Strong patriarchal attitudes define gender roles when it comes to the sharing of family responsibilities. Men are the breadwinners and women are the homemakers. In the post-Soviet period, there has been a sharp decline in the number of marriages and an increase in the number of divorces and women-headed households.

Birth rates have dropped in the recent past due to economic difficulties, housing problems, and unemployment. There is no stigma attached to childlessness in Lithuania.

In the event of divorce, women usually get custody of children, although men also have equal rights in this regard. Women also have the right to their share of the conjugal property as well as to obtain maintenance and child support money from their ex-husbands.

Health

Lithuanian women have equal access to healthcare by trained personnel in family planning centers and state healthcare institutions. The healthcare system guarantees free care to pregnant women and mothers until their baby is one year of age.

The rate of abortion is high in Lithuania, as it is in most former Soviet states. Women can make their own healthcare decisions, and the consent of the husband is desirable, but not mandatory, for an abortion. Consent of at least one parent is required for a minor under 16 to have an abortion. Women have free access to birth control, and contraceptives are available in public and private pharmacies. Oral birth control pills are available without prescription.

Women in Business

General View

Lithuania has witnessed an increase in the female labor force, to the point where 66 percent are employed despite prevalent gender discrimination. Women are still confined to female-oriented and generally lower-paying jobs in the education, health, and service sectors. The recent decrease in the number of women in the public sector

suggests that Lithuanian women may slowly be entering male-dominated areas of the private sector.

Legal Rights

The Lithuanian Constitution guarantees women equal rights under family law and property law. Lithuanian women got the right to vote in 1921. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, an independent agency, administers the proper implementation of equality rights and investigates complaints regarding gender discrimination.

Lithuanian women have legal provisions to receive equal pay for equal work, but, on average, women earn 16 percent less than men. Statistics show, however, that the wage differential is decreasing.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Lithuanian women have occupied lower-paying jobs as teachers, doctors, nurses, and administrative staff. Nearly 67 percent of women work in the service sector, 20 percent in industries, and 13 percent in agriculture. Recently women have successfully ventured into some male-dominated sectors in finance, energy, and utilities, and a Lithuanian government survey showed an increase in the number of women managers in 2001.

Some prominent women leaders include Aida Zigmantaviciene, the managing director of SATRIJA Ab, a well-known garment manufacturing company started in 1955; Inga Smirnoviene, the head of the marketing department of Invalda Real Estate and a member of the board of Save the Children of Lithuania; and Jurgita Slekyte, Legal Department head for Omnitel and a member of the corporate governance working group at the Investors Forum, an association established to improve the business environment in Lithuania..

Lithuanian laws prohibit women from working underground in mines, holding jobs that involve exposure to dangerous or hazardous situations, and working at night.

Generally Lithuanian women dress in suits, dresses, skirts, and shirts for business situations or work. They reserve their traditional dress for special occasions like festivals or weddings.

In the case of working mothers, members of the immediate family help in childcare. Working mothers can also avail themselves of private nurseries and kindergartens.

Women as Business Owners

Lithuanian women constitute approximately 39 percent of the total self-employed population. Lithuanian women entrepreneurs chiefly run small-scale businesses in sewing, hairdressing and beauty salons, restaurants and cafes, private stomatology surgeries, private clinics, and sports clubs. Lack of practical training and business skills hinders their entrepreneurial activities, but the state encourages more women to engage in entrepreneurial activities through its Business Information Centers, which offer information, counseling, and training services.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although Lithuania has only a few women managers, local businessmen generally treat foreign businesswomen with respect. Long handshakes, friendly

smiles, and the exchange of business cards are the normal business greeting in Lithuania.

Make appointments well in advance and mention the gender and rank of the visiting delegates clearly. Avoid scheduling meeting in the months of July and August or during national holidays.

Luxembourg

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Luxembourgian women enjoy equal status with men. Women's participation in work outside home is relatively low compared to other developed countries, mainly because many women do not find it economically necessary. Stay-at-home women are eligible for social security and other benefits, as housework is considered to be employment in Luxembourg.

Women working in the agricultural sector are protected by various laws and regulations. Women can jointly manage a farm with their husbands as equal partners. Women working in agriculture are also granted insurance coverage for old age, sickness, and disability.

Luxembourgian culture can be described as paternal, as men carry the roles of heads of houses and primary breadwinners. Socially, looking after the home and kids has remained the primary responsibility of women.

Women represent only 37 percent of the total labor force in Luxembourg. In some sectors, wages are 20 to 30 percent lower for women. Women are often compelled to take up part-time employment or jobs that are below their capabilities.

The percentage of working women has doubled in the last twenty years, even though the actual number of working women still remains low. Women are increasingly entering fields like law, journalism, medicine, and public service. Women held 23 percent of the seats in Parliament in 2005 and 10 percent of ministerial posts.

There is no racial or cultural segmentation within Luxembourg that affects women's condition, but the population of foreign migrants from neighboring Germany, Belgium, and France is very high. These women typically have a marginal status and are employed in the country's low-wage positions.

There are no specific dress code restrictions for women in Luxembourg.

Legal Rights

Women received the right to vote and to run for office in 1919. The first woman representative to Parliament was elected in 1919.

Women are granted equal rights under property law, family law, and other laws. Article 11 of the Constitution provides various basic rights including natural rights of the individual and of the family, the right to work, freedom of trade and industry, and the freedom to work in a profession or in agriculture.

Women have legal reproductive rights and the right to an abortion under many circumstances.

Luxembourgian women have the right to initiate divorce on specific grounds or by mutual consent. Custody can be granted to either of the parents by the court if the divorce is on specific grounds. Generally, the woman is granted custody, particularly if the children are very young.

Education

The rate of literacy is 100 percent for both men and women. Women have equal access to education but are still lagging behind men in terms of educational qualifications. Most women have only a lower secondary qualification, and just 15 percent hold a higher degree (the European Union average is 17 percent). Primary school enrollment is 91 percent, secondary school enrollment is 83 percent, and higher education enrollment is 13 percent. The absence of universities in Luxembourg is a major factor, as students have to travel to neighboring countries for higher studies.

The unemployment rate for women in the country is very high compared to other EU countries, at 45 percent, but this is partially due to voluntary unemployment.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Luxembourgians have been distancing themselves from the institution of marriage over the last few years. It is estimated that nearly 33 percent of couples living together are unmarried, while around 30 percent of marriages end in divorce. One-seventh of all children are born to unmarried mothers.

Young people typically date people they meet in schools or in social and leisure settings. Online dating has also become widespread in Luxembourg. The legal marriageable age is 18 years for both men and women, and most Luxembourgian women marry in their early twenties. Minors cannot marry without the consent of parents or a legal representative.

Luxembourgian women usually take their husbands' surnames after marriage, although it is common for women to use their maiden names or both names. Children, however, get their father's name. There is no particular stigma attached to childlessness in Luxembourg, although there is some societal concern over the low birth rate of 1.7 children per woman (down from two per woman in 1975).

Women are primarily in charge of the household duties, and men are considered the head of the household. However, Luxembourgian women have the right to hold assets separately from their husbands.

Foreign women who marry a Luxembourgian are entitled to become citizens of the country. However, if the marriage ends in a divorce, they have to go back to their country within three years after the signing of the legal agreement.

Parents typically have joint custody in case of divorce by mutual consent. Otherwise, the courts grant custody in the best interests of the children.

Health

Women in Luxembourg have access to excellent healthcare facilities across the country. Women have a high life expectancy rate (79.3 years), but have substantially higher rates of death due to cardiovascular diseases, cerebro-vascular diseases, and cancer than the European Union average.

Luxembourgian women have the right to make their own health care decisions and have full access to reproductive healthcare and family planning services.

Women in Business

General View

The women of Luxembourg enjoy the same political and economic status as men. They comprise 39 percent of the job market, but many natives in this wealthy nation work for personal reasons rather than for income and quit their jobs after marriage. Some 40 percent of working women in Luxembourg are not citizens, and they participate in the workforce to a more significant extent than locally born women.

Legal Rights

Luxembourgian women gained the right to vote in 1919. They also have the right to own and inherit property. The law also permits equal division of property in the event of a divorce. The salary paid to a woman must be equal to that of a man for the same kind of job, according to Luxembourgian law. Data from Luxembourg Central Statistics, however, shows that wage differentials are decreasing, but salaries paid to women are still 20 to 30 percent less than those of men.

Women in Professions

Women represent 33 percent of all employees, but only 16 percent of top managers are women. About 33 percent of Luxembourgian women are involved in agriculture, 10.9 percent are in the industrial sector, and 45.7 percent are in the service sector (mostly as shop assistants, hair stylists, and secretaries; many are also in the financial services business). In enterprises with less than 15 employees, women represent only 12 to 16 percent of the managers and 40 percent of the laborers. In enterprises with more than 15 employees, only 11 percent of women serve in managerial positions, and 33 percent are laborers. The government is offering financial incentives to companies to hire women in certain fields where they are under-represented.

Luxembourgian women in important positions in the country include: Lydie Err, a lawyer, politician, former minister, and human rights activist; Marie-Josée Jacobs a politician, trade-unionist, and former government minister for Agriculture, Wine-Growing, and Rural Development; and Sylvie Oliveira, a Luxembourg-born woman of Portuguese origin, who is a well-known manager at the firm Office City.

Luxembourgian law prohibits pregnant women and new mothers from working in night shifts. The country has no air force or navy, and women were not allowed to serve in the army until 1987. They now constitute less than one percent of the Army's personnel.

The government has established an extensive network of daycare centers for both local and foreign babies. Children under 3 years of age are eligible for social service facilities provided through many policies. Many working parents hire child-minders who do not have any formal qualifications, social security, or insurance coverage.

Luxembourgian women are not subject to any dress code restrictions

Women as Business Owners

Most Luxembourgian women business owners run small businesses with limited investment, long hours, and few employees. Women own businesses like dressmaking, designing, hair dressing, nursery and primary schools, garment manufacturing units, retail businesses, and import and export businesses. The government provides minimal financial and training support for women's entrepreneurial activities.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen have no problems doing business in Luxembourg. Business meetings are very brief, and people usually get right down to business. Shaking hands with everyone, irrespective of age and gender, is the common form of greeting. Very close friends kiss each other on the cheeks. Remember to show proper respect to people in important positions. Feel free to invite a Luxembourgian man to dinner.

Macau

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The women of Macau enjoy a position in society generally on a comparable level with men. The government has initiated a number of laws to safeguard women's rights and interests. Macau women have equal access to opportunities and facilities in most areas of society. Although gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, maternity-related dismissals, and pay disparities are reported, problems remain relatively few.

Macau is a male-dominated society, and Chinese patriarchal attitudes prevail regarding women's role and status in society. However, Macau's laws make it compulsory for private and public organizations to treat women equally. Social and economic class were once of critical importance to women, but that is no longer the case. Members of the highest economic class live comparatively privileged lives, but class distinctions are generally fewer.

The status of Macau women is undergoing change, though some activists claim that it is change for the worse. Macau's burgeoning wealth has ensured that the government now focuses on economic policy and political stability rather than on gender equality.

In the political arena, there are few women in power, though some of them hold senior level positions. In 2005, of the 29 Legislative Assembly members, six were women, including the President of the Assembly. In the medical field, an increasingly larger number of women are entering the workforce, though their numbers are limited amongst doctors and surgeons. The same applies for the judiciary where, in spite of increased participation, women make up 19.2 percent of all judicial officers and judges. Women who own businesses are rare in Macau. Urban Macau women often have careers, while their rural counterparts usually work the fields.

Macau's population is mostly ethnic Chinese (95.7 percent). Macanese women, who have mixed Portuguese and Asian ancestry, and women in other small minorities have similar status to the Chinese majority because of Macau's cosmopolitan character.

There are no dress code restrictions for Macau women.

Legal Rights

Macau women have the same legal rights as the men in the country. They have the right to vote, to drive cars, and own and inherit property. Although women have the legal right to inherit, some still follow the Chinese practice of the oldest son inheriting most of the family property.

Abortions in Macau are legal when the life, mental health, or physical health of the mother is in danger; if the pregnancy is the result of rape, incest, or some other sex offence; or if the fetus is severely impaired.

Women can initiate divorce proceedings in Macau, and they are allowed to claim custody of their children.

Education

Women have equal access to education. Macau women have a literacy rate of 94.5 percent, as compared to 97.2 percent for the men. The literacy rate for women appears to be improving, as 98 percent of women between 15 and 24 are literate. Most Macau girls complete their secondary education, with many going on to complete university and even doctoral levels of education.

Educated women have access to many job opportunities. There is some discrimination in hiring practices and pay rates for women, but these are difficult to document.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Macau women have the freedom to choose their own spouses, though the family usually gets involved at some point. According to Macau's laws, the legal marriageable age for women is 18, though the average age for a woman's first marriage is about 26.

Women in Macau are allowed to date. However, dating in Macau shows a serious commitment that should end in marriage, so young people generally begin dating after they've finished their secondary education, in their late teens. Macau women meet men at schools, dances, social events, and through friends.

Polygamy is neither legally nor socially acceptable in Macau. There are reports of people living in polygamous unions, though these marriages probably took place before the ban on polygamy was instituted in October of 1971.

In extended families, the oldest woman in the household remains in charge of family affairs. With the increase in the number of nuclear families in Macau society, more women are in charge of their own households.

Macau women do not take their husband's names after marriage. They are allowed to hold assets separately from their husbands.

Childlessness is not always considered bad in Macau society, with many women choosing to remain childless in order to focus on their careers. In some communities, though, there is pressure to have a son.

In the event of a divorce, women in Macau's society have the right to claim a share of the conjugal property. Women have equal rights to custody of children. Macau's laws require that the opinion of children aged 10 and above must be factored into the judge's decision on granting custody.

Health

Macau's female population has equal access to healthcare and medical services, which are free to all citizens.

Advances in the country's healthcare technology and services have seen the standards of medical service increase considerably in recent years. The maternal mortality rate for the country is almost zero. Infant mortality rates stand at 4.35 per 1,000 live births.

Macau women are allowed to make their own healthcare decisions. Macau does not have any official family planning measures in place, and those measures taken by the government of mainland China do not affect the local population.

Women in Business

General View

The women of Macau actively participate in business, accounting for about 43 percent of the work force, and they enjoy a considerable influence and responsibility in public and business life. Women have entered professional fields including sciences and engineering, law, teaching, accounting, social sciences, health, medicine, and last, but not least, Macau's major industry, gambling.

Women do not encounter any significant social or cultural barriers in social and economic life. The traditional roles of women have undergone a profound change where the majority of women today now divide their activities between the household, their job, and their various social activities.

Legal Rights

According to law, all permanent residents of Macau (those who have lived there for seven years or more) have the right to vote and stand for elections. Inheritance laws still follow an adapted form of Portuguese law, but they acknowledge the Chinese customary law on succession and family matters. Generally, the property or the estate passes to the eldest son.

Equal opportunity legislation enacted in 1995, applicable to all public and private organizations, mandates that women receive equal pay for equal work, prohibits discrimination in all spheres, and establishes penalties for employers who infringe these guidelines. Even so, according to some informal information, women do not receive equal pay for equal work, especially in the construction sector.

Women in Professions

A large number of women work in the gambling industry, which accounts for over 40 percent of Macau's GDP. They also work in manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, the hospitality industry, the public sector, other service businesses, and agriculture.

Women now represent a high percentage of posts in administrative, legislative, and judicial organs of the Macao SAR. The leading and most colorful business personality of Macau is undoubtedly Pansy Ho, the daughter and heir-apparent of Stanley Ho, the billionaire and gambling baron. She now runs, along with her father, their business empire (Sociedade De Turismo e Diversões De Macau) consisting of casinos, hotels, real estate, and other activities. Jennie M. F. Kong, the president of The Macau Businesswomen Association and Gloria Ung, senior manager of the External Co-operation Department, are two other prominent female executives in Macau.

Macau women are not barred from any professions, and there are no dress code restrictions. Women dress in smart, European clothing when they appear in professional and business settings.

In the case of working women, extended family members take care of children. Macau has established four daycare

centers for children, with trained staff. The government facilitates the formation of mutual help childcare groups and has also revised childcare law to prevent unsuitable persons from providing childcare services.

Women as Business Owners

Many women own businesses in Macau in the areas of textiles, footwear, toys, incense, machinery, enamel, firecrackers, wooden furniture, Chinese wines, and electronic goods. They generally run small and medium-sized businesses.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The people of Macau revere women, so foreign women are always warmly welcomed and given respect. Older people are also accorded particular respect. Make appointments at least two months in advance.

Business norms include handshakes upon meeting and business cards written in English and Chinese. On receiving a business card, politely spare a few moments to study the card, and do not write anything on someone's card. Negotiations take place at a slow pace, and extensive attention is given to details. While conducting business in Macau, women should dress smartly in suits or tailored dresses. Moreover, some expensive restaurants will insist on certain dress code. Do not wear blue or white at social functions, as these colors are associated with death and mourning.

Macedonia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In Macedonia, strong gender roles assign men the responsibility of providing the material needs of the family and women the responsibility of caring for children and the home. Religious ideology upholds these conservative and traditional views on gender and, as a result, fewer women than men are employed.

Women are also grossly underrepresented in the managerial or leadership positions. In politics, women hold about 20 percent of seats in the lower house and 20 percent of ministerial seats. Representation in municipal councils and the local self-government bodies is low. Women are well represented in law as legal consultants and in-house lawyers, however, and represent about 18 percent of the self-employed.

Women in rural areas have a much harder life than their urban counterparts due to a lack of adequate housing, clean water, communications, agricultural credits, and development programs. The Albanian ethnic community (or Albano-Macedonians) follows a stricter patriarchal family structure than other communities in Macedonia. Roma women have a higher level of illiteracy and school abandonment, lower employment prospects, smaller pensions, and more limited access to health care.

There are no dress code restrictions in Macedonia. Businesswomen often wear suits, and traditional costumes are generally reserved for festivals.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia grants equality to all citizens. Women have the right to vote, to own and transfer property, to initiate court procedures, and to borrow from banks.

Women have the right to have an abortion, although minors need the approval of parents or guardians first. Women can initiate divorces and receive custody of children.

Education

Equal access to education is guaranteed under Macedonian law. The adult female literacy rate is 94 percent, compared to 96 percent for men. Both male and female children enjoy the same quality of education in terms of the curricula and teaching staff, as their schools are coeducational. Strong prejudices and stereotypes, however, exist among many ethnic communities. Male children have priority in education, while many girls drop out of school to seek work.

Educated women have good chances of obtaining gainful employment. However, the laws on equal treatment of men and women at the workplace still need to be implemented effectively.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages are being replaced by the trend of young people choosing their own partners. Urban youth

start dating in their late teens. The legal age for marriage in Macedonia is 18 for both men and women.

After marriage, Macedonian women have the choice of keeping their maiden name, of taking their husbands' surnames, or of combining the two. About 80 percent of women take their husbands' surnames.

Macedonian women have the legal right to hold assets separate from their husbands, but property is usually registered under the name of the husband. This makes it difficult for women to obtain financial credit in their own right.

Female fertility is highly valued in Macedonian society as the creator and preserver of family succession, so childless women face severe condemnation, especially in rural areas. Polygamy is a crime punishable with imprisonment, but polygyny is occasionally seen among Muslims.

Men and women have equal rights to petition for divorce and equal rights to custody of children, but mothers often get custody of small children. Both parents have an equal obligation to the ongoing welfare of the child.

Health

The Constitution guarantees women, mothers in particular, access to healthcare, but many new laws lack provisions for the specific protection of women's health. A majority of children in both urban and rural areas are delivered with professional assistance, and medical visits to the home of a newborn are part of state-sponsored maternity care. The shortage of money and personnel hampers the implementation of this system, however. The infant mortality rate is about 10 deaths for every 1,000 live births.

Women have the legal right to make their own healthcare decisions, although certain social and cultural subgroups deny women this right. Economic factors are the biggest barrier to women seeking healthcare services.

Interesting Social Customs

If the bride is found to have been a virgin on the wedding night, the parents of the groom serve the drink *blaga rakia* (a hot and sweet fruit brandy) the next morning.

Women in Business

General View

The situation of Macedonian women is finally turning a corner after the fall of the Soviet Union and the dismemberment of Yugoslavia. The instability caused by these two developments adversely affected the economic climate, and it will take some time for women to catch up with other European women. In the mean time, the economic situation in Macedonia requires women to work harder than ever.

Women occupy much of the informal sector, agricultural production, and are prominent in academics as well. Traditional conservative society restricts women to domestic and family responsibilities, so working women have to bear the burden of work and family that makes it difficult for them to participate in public life. Moreover, the

lack of educational opportunities and traditional gender-biased perceptions has caused a situation where few women hold high managerial posts. Due to the efforts of many NGOs in the last decade, women's roles in Macedonia have seen a gradual change for the better. The country's independence should also positively affect the prospects of Macedonian women.

Legal Rights

The Macedonian constitution offers equal rights to women, but the de facto situation is different and the country's patriarchal society inhibits women from realizing their legitimate rights.

Although Macedonia granted women the right to vote in 1946, poverty, traditional prejudices, and inadequate education keep many women from exercising their right to vote. Under law, women have equal rights to property and inheritance, but they are generally bypassed in inheritance matters in favor of male heirs. The fact that communal property is also usually registered in the husband's name also results in women facing difficulties in accessing credit in their own right.

Legally, women have the right to equal pay for equal work, but women generally receive 56 percent as much as men.

Women in Professions

Macedonian women primarily engage in agriculture and related fields. They also work in the service sector as secretaries and administrative officers. While men dominate in the sciences and engineering, women have high representation in the humanities. Female legislators, senior officials, and managers constitute 27 percent of the total government employment, while female professional and technical workers account for 51 percent of the total work force.

A few Macedonian women have established themselves in business. Marija Perkovska, for instance, runs IST Komerc, a medium-sized enterprise engaged in the business of women's underwear and clothing, and Ognjanovska Orhideja is the owner of T.P. Magnolija Ognjanovski Dooel, a small sized-enterprise trading in children's wear.

Macedonian laws do not prohibit women from any particular profession. Generally, mothers, grandmothers, neighbors, and older siblings take care of infants for working women. Apart from state-sponsored childcare facilities, urban areas also have privately run nursery schools and kindergartens.

Women as Business Owners

Macedonian women constitute 21 percent of employers. Another 18 percent of women are self-employed. Women generally own small and medium scale enterprises in the service industries, export and import units, garment and textile manufacturing, and retail businesses. Lack of land, financial aid, and education generally inhibit women from entrepreneurial activities.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Macedonian business culture is generally similar to that of Western Europe. Foreign visitors should make business appointments in advance and avoid scheduling meetings in the peak summer holidays or during Christmas, when most of establishments are closed. Foreign businesswomen are advised to dress in conservative business attire.

Madagascar

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The traditional male-dominated culture of Madagascar views men as superior to women and relegates women to household and familial activities. Recent laws guaranteeing equal legal rights to women may, however, increase the participation of women in politics and the economy in Madagascar.

Ethnic groups in Madagascar are historically matriarchal, but are more patriarchal these days. Women have to seek the advice of men for all major decisions. Traditional practices impede the development of women, in spite of the provisions in the legal system. As a result, widespread discrimination relegates women to underpaid jobs, and they are often victims of domestic violence.

Malagasy women are highly marginalized in politics. The 160-member National Assembly elected in last December has only eight women representatives (5 percent of seats). Most working women have occupations in the informal sector, though a few women own small businesses in the service sector.

Women from the urban upper class have better opportunities in education, health, and economic participation than their lower-class and rural counterparts. Women of the upper classes often obtain professional positions after their university educations.

In some rural areas, Malagasy women have become the victims of sexual exploitation. In Fianarantsoa, girls are sold in a place called *tsenan'ampela* (girl fair) once a month.

In Southeast Madagascar, each village has a male community called *analahy amin-dray* (the brothers and fathers) and a female division called *anakavy amin-dreny* (the sisters and mothers). Although they hold separate meetings, the two groups jointly discuss issues concerning the community as a whole.

Malagasy women dress conservatively in dresses or skirts and blouses. They also wear their traditional *lamba* to cover their skirts. Women are now prohibited from wearing *kisaly* (headscarves) at work.

Legal Rights

Women have equal rights to vote and to run for office in Madagascar. Although Malagasy women have the same legal rights as men, customary laws prevail over statutory laws in most areas and restrict women from realizing their rights.

Under customary laws of inheritance, men inherit land and women take over movable property and jewelry. In the absence of a male heir, women become the beneficiary.

The penal code prohibits abortion even when the pregnancy is caused by rape. Malagasy women can initiate divorce on the grounds of infidelity, desertion, or non-support. Normally, courts award the custody of children to mothers.

Education

Malagasy women have equal access to the educational system, which provides mandatory, coeducational schooling for children from six to fourteen years of age (five years of primary education and four years of secondary education). However, most girls in rural areas drop out of school even at the primary level. Men have a significantly higher literacy rate (77 percent) than women (65 percent).

The disparity translates to the workplace, where men dominate better paid jobs and senior positions in spite of women's legal equality of opportunity.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Malagasy women have the liberty to choose their own partners, but sometimes parents arrange marriages to maintain familial or social relationships. Malagasy culture allows courtship, which eventually leads to engagement and marriage. The minimum legal age of marriage for a woman is 17.

Married women usually retain their maiden names after marriage. While men provide for the economic needs of the family, women take the responsibility for household chores and child-rearing. Generally, Malagasy women do not hold assets separate from their husbands even when they have the legal right to do so.

Although statutory laws prohibit polygamy, it is commonly practiced in many areas.

The society castigates childless women by calling them *fotsinantsy* (childless wives) and accords high regard to fertile woman as *renianaka* (mother of children).

Upon divorce, women have the right to half the property gained during marriage. In some areas, divorced women get only one third of the couple's joint property, based on the traditional practice known as "the customary third." Mothers usually receive the custody of children.

Health

Malagasy women have equal access to the country's mediocre healthcare system. The lack of proper medical support and family planning techniques has resulted in an increase in the maternal and infant mortality rates.

Malagasy women do not have the right to make their own healthcare decisions, including those related to birth control. The unavailability of contraceptives and the lack of knowledge about them has led to an increase in the number of unwanted pregnancies.

Interesting Social Customs

Ethnic groups in Madagascar have taboos against eating pork, eel, sea turtles, and cows without horns. When a woman marries a man of a different ethnic group, she observes both her and her husband's *faddy* (food taboos).

Women in Business

General View

Malagasy women make a significant contribution to the economy of the country, but they have traditionally been confined to low-paid jobs and domestic labor in the informal sector due to gender stereotypes and limited access to education. Recently, however, Madagascar has witnessed a change in the status of women. Now women own 30 percent of formal sector companies, 53 percent of informal sector companies, and many young Malagasy women are showing an interest in becoming entrepreneurs.

Legal Rights

Malagasy women won the right to vote in 1959, and statutory law gives them equal inheritance rights as well. In reality, however, Malagasy customary laws have a strong influence on the legal code of Madagascar, and inheritance practice follows customary laws, whereby sons inherit land and property from fathers and daughters inherit movable property like furniture and jewelry. On average, women earn 40 percent less than men and are relegated to lower-paid jobs.

Women in Professions

The majority of Malagasy women in rural areas take part in subsistence farming, fishing, and coral gathering. They also have a significant presence in the production of handicrafts and textiles. The public and private sectors have only 28 percent of women as middle or senior managers.

A few prominent women from Madagascar include: Mirana Abraham, owner of the Mirado boutique and a traditional textile manufacturing unit; Arlette Ramaroson, the Malagasy judge at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda; and Gisele Rabesahala, who holds the post of the vice president of the Senate of Madagascar. Although women have shown a considerable progress in the education sector, family responsibilities impede women's participation in most economic activities. The labor law prohibits women from working at night and grants pregnant women two months leave with half pay.

Traditional Malagasies dress conservatively in dresses or skirts and blouses and a *lamba* (the country's traditional handwoven cloth) wrapped around them. Modern Malagasy women prefer to dress in Western outfits for work, and they do not wear headscarves. Working mothers have members of the immediate family members help in childcare. Working mothers can also avail the facilities of private childcare centers. There are no state-sponsored daycare facilities.

Women as Business Owners

Indian, French, and Chinese businesswomen dominate the ownership of female-owned business enterprises. Women mostly run small-scale businesses such as basket making, agricultural products, beverages, and textiles. Women in coastal areas make T-shirts and other handicrafts and sell them to foreign tourists. Despite their impressive gains, the lack of capital and familial responsibilities generally limit the extent of entrepreneurial activities by Malagasy women.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

In most areas, Malagasy people receive foreign businesswomen with respect and hospitality. Generally, visiting businesswomen should try to follow local customs in order to earn their host's respect and improve their business prospects. Remember not to use red ink on your business cards in Madagascar. Red signifies bad luck in Madagascar. Foreign businesswomen should take precautionary safety measures as crimes are common. Malagasies consider tortoises as sacred and do not eat pork or eel, which are taboo. Malagasies have many customs attached to the veneration of their ancestors. The *Sakalavans* regard the Nosy Faly Island sacred and expect visitors to show equal respect to this place.

Malawi

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Malawi has a highly patriarchal culture. Although the law guarantees equality for all citizens irrespective of gender, social traditions dictate otherwise. Women work very hard and are responsible for household chores from childhood. The gender discrimination imbedded in the social structure limits women's access to education, employment, and financial resources. Social class has little effect on women's status.

Since the 1990s, initiatives sponsored by the government and non-governmental organizations have increased opportunities for education and employment. These initiatives have improved overall conditions for women, who are becoming more likely to take advantage of these opportunities.

The first woman was elected to the Malawian parliament in 1964. Women have since achieved only a modest level of representation in politics, with 27 women in the 193-seat National Assembly and 5 women in the 30-member cabinet. There are 2 female justices on the 23-member Supreme and High Courts. Many women have made the transition from trading to operating small businesses, and some even manage village industries, work traditionally done by men. Women in managerial positions at large companies remain rare.

Over 80 percent of the Malawi population is rural, and most depend on farming and allied sectors. Rural women participate in agriculture, but inadequate access to resources limits their productivity and economic strength. Traditional customs and practices, which often downgrade women, are more prevalent in rural areas. Urban women have better education and employment opportunities.

There are many sub-cultures within Malawi, each with their own traditions. Most are patrilineal, though there are matrilineal communities, such as the *Yao*, *Chewa*, *Lomwe*, and the *Mang'anja*. Women in matrilineal communities are more independent, with greater control over property and inheritance.

A law prohibiting women from wearing slacks and short skirts was repealed a few years ago, but women who choose to wear them still face opposition. Most Malawian women wear traditional garments, three pieces of fabric wrapped and draped in a standard way, in colors that represent their region. Men, in contrast, dress in Western clothes.

Legal Rights

Every Malawian citizen, male or female, has the same Constitutional rights and freedoms, including the right to own and manage property independently. Malawian women have had the right to vote since 1961. Although the Constitution prohibits the enactment of any discriminatory laws, it does not address issues that present challenges to women, including marriage, abortion, and divorce.

Women can inherit property if a will exists detailing what they should inherit. Otherwise, property is distributed according to traditional rules, and a widow normally receives nothing. In communities that follow the patrilineal system, only sons inherit land directly. Women in such families have rights to use and profit from land owned by others. In matrilineal communities, women normally inherit property from their mothers.

Abortions can be performed only as a last resort to save the life of the woman. The family planning policy introduced in 1982 gives individuals the freedom only to determine the spacing between children and not the number of children.

Women can initiate divorce in Malawi. Custody of the children in divorce depends on the traditions of the particular community, but in most cases women do not get custody of their children.

Education

Early marriages, adolescent pregnancies, social and economic constraints, and inaccessibility of schools are some of the reasons for the low levels of female literacy in Malawi. Girls are expected to do housework from a very young age, making education a low priority. The female adult literacy rate in 2003 was 49.8 percent, as compared to the male literacy rate of 76.1 percent. Girls' access to vocational training is also limited. Among girls who do attend school, dropout rates are very high, with over 75 percent leaving by the end of primary school. Schools are co-educational, with boys and girls sharing the same classrooms.

Girls from better socio-economic backgrounds who can afford an education have better chances of getting jobs. Even then, women have far fewer opportunities available to them than men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Dating is almost unknown in Malawi. Household elders, usually uncles, arrange marriages for young people. Dowries from the bride's family to the groom are common, and are a determining factor in most marriages. The legal marriageable age is 18, and at last count, the average age of first marriage for women was just over 18 years of age. Young people from 15 to 18 can marry with the approval of parents or guardians, and girls in some regions commonly marry even before they are 15.

The African Marriage (Christian Rites) Act of 1923 allows polygamous marriages, which are more common in the southern and northern areas, but rarely seen in central Malawi. Each wife in a polygamous marriage is usually given her own household.

A Malawian woman can retain her maiden name after marriage and use it along with or independently of her husband's surname. Legally, women have the right to own property separate from their husbands.

Family elders make all household decisions. Women are primarily responsible for taking care of the family and house. They are expected to conceive children, which determine a woman's status in society. In cases of divorce, mothers usually lose custody of children.

Health

Malawian access to healthcare is poor, with over two-thirds of women living more than an hour's walk away from a healthcare center. This is worse in some rural areas, where healthcare centers are at least five kilometers away from most villages. Poverty and lack of knowledge make women vulnerable to many health disorders. Women need approval and financial support from their husbands or other male relatives to access medical services, including emergency care.

Malawi's maternal mortality rate was the second highest in the world in 2003, and recently stood at 1,820 per 100,000. The estimated infant mortality rate for 2006 is 94.37 deaths per 1,000 live births.

The fertility rate is high in Malawi, with about 6.7 children per woman. Use of contraceptives has increased from 7 percent in 1992 to over 20 percent in 2000, as acceptance of contraceptive use is slowly growing.

Interesting Social Customs

Carrying heavy loads is considered appropriate work for women or children in Malawi. If a man accompanies his wife to the market or to gather firewood, he simply leads the way while she carries whatever they buy or collect.

Women in Business

General View

Malawian women's increasing access to higher education has not ensured better job opportunities for them; they still face low literacy rates (around 46 percent), gender discrimination, gender stereotyping, the lack of access to credit facilities, and the general level of poverty in the country.

Although women make up over half of the total population, only half of them are formally employed, in spite of equal legal rights granted by the Constitution. Women still limit themselves to certain sectors and jobs, like nursing, teaching, sales, and secretarial work. In 2000, women represented only five percent of managers and administrators in the country.

There have, however, been efforts made by the government to improve the lot of women in recent years under Balali Muluzi's presidency. International groups, non-governmental organizations, and associations like the National Association of Business Women (NABW) also strive to improve women's standing in Malawi society. By the year 2000, NABW had trained and initiated over 12,000 women into the business sector as entrepreneurs.

Legal Rights

The Malawi constitution grants equal rights and protection to all, irrespective of gender. Women have the right to vote and to own, inherit, and manage property. However, these rights have not sufficiently protected women from discrimination at all levels. Many women, especially widows, face difficulties in relation to inheritance, marriage, and family issues.

Women are provided with widow's rights, child support, maternity leaves, and other benefits under the Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare, and Community Services. In reality, however, workplace discrimination against women

is rampant right from the beginning stages, as women are questioned about their family, children, future marital plans, and other personal issues during the job interview. There is also a wide gap in the wages and benefits of men and women employed in similar jobs.

Women in Professions

The Malawi economy is predominantly agricultural, with most women employed on an informal basis. Rural women do not have access to finance or credit for purchasing farm equipment or supplies. In the urban areas, women are mostly engaged in specific "feminine" occupations like teaching or nursing.

The participation of women in the public sector has increased since the mid-1990s. The 192-member National Assembly has 27 women, with six women in the 28-seat Cabinet. Women's proportion in the civil services is about 25 percent, and a woman holds the post of Inspector General of Police, the highest position in the law enforcement sector. There are also two female justices in the Supreme and High Courts.

Malawian women are inspired by women like Joyce Banda, a prominent businesswoman, government minister, activist, and founder of the NABW, and Roselyn Lois Mankhwala, Director of Ntonya Private Schools and founder of Women in Partnership against HIV/AIDS.

Women are prohibited from working at night or underground. In earlier years, they were also restricted from joining the armed forces or working in churches.

Women are expected to dress decently at work. Previously, slacks and short skirts were banned, but this law has been repealed.

Working women either put their children in childcare centers or take the help of relatives or older children to take care of young children.

Women as Business Owners

The female economic activity rate in 2003 was 77.5 percent compared to the male economic activity rate of about 86 percent. Most of the women-owned businesses are small or medium scale enterprises. Some of the most common entrepreneurial activities for women are knitting, tailoring, beer brewing, grass and cane work, crocheting, and retail trading. Malawian women are also entering, albeit slowly, male-dominated fields like manufacturing, transport and communication, and community and social services.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are expected to be respectful and decent, especially with senior or elderly people. Malawians are very diligent and give much importance to punctuality.

Women should not be aggressive in body language or speech. Shaking hands is acceptable while meeting and departing. Dress formally, especially during the first few meetings.

Malaysia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Malaysia is one of the most progressive Islamic countries in Asia, if not the world, and the increased rate of female employment continues to have an impact on their role in society. Modern Malaysian society now perceives a women's role as a wife, a mother, and an individual with the potential to contribute in other ways to her family and society. Even those women who prefer to remain homemakers form small social groups and utilize the facilities provided by social welfare organizations to improve their quality of life.

Women hold more than 10 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives and 25 percent of the seats in the Senate. Malaysian women are also entering the business arena in increasing numbers. Female entrepreneurs own 16 percent of small to medium-scale businesses, mostly in service sectors, and may receive financial assistance and counseling from the government. Malaysian women, however, have yet to make inroads in the fields of medicine and engineering.

Rural women suffer from disparities in education and employment opportunities. The Malaysian government has formulated policies to provide occupation-oriented education to rural women. The National Agriculture Policy, for example, is designed to boost women's participation in agriculture. In addition, with more men moving to urban areas, women have begun to control their farms.

The country has an array of ethnic groups and religions: majority Malay Muslims, Buddhist Chinese, and Hindu Indians. The general lifestyle of Malay Muslim women is conditioned by the tenets of Islam, but this in no way stands in the way of their progress. Similarly, the Indian community is guided by Hindu norms and the Chinese women by their traditional Buddhist values. In general, however, none of these sub-cultures has prevented women from making educational or career advancements.

The general dress code is very conservative, and Muslim women never wear revealing clothes. Others are free to dress as they please: in traditional Indian clothing or Western outfits.

Legal Rights

The Constitution declares that all citizens are equal irrespective of gender differences, and Malaysian women generally receive just treatment in all fields. Malaysian women have exercised their voting right since independence in 1957. They can own or inherit property, and the government is actively trying to reduce the gender discrimination that is present in customary law.

Abortion is permissible to save the life or to preserve the physical and mental health of the mother.

Malaysian women, irrespective of the sub-culture to which they belong, can apply for divorce on grounds of domestic violence or adultery, but are obliged to offer proof. The court determines the custody of the children and routinely

grants visitation rights to the other parent. If a child is born out of wedlock, the guardianship right lies with the mother.

Education

Malaysian women are ensured equal opportunity in education and have made considerable strides. The overall female literacy rate in Malaysia is about 85 percent, while that of men is 92 percent. About 93 percent of girls are enrolled in primary schools in Malaysia's coeducational school system.

Sixty-six percent of university students are female, and most still study humanities rather than technical or science subjects. There are also more women students than male students in teacher training colleges. In an effort to help students break out of traditional educational choices, the Ministry of Education has introduced a subject called Living Skills, through which male students learn domestic sciences and female students obtain training in traditionally male areas like carpentry.

State laws permit women to take up any occupation, but it is sometimes harder for women to find adequate and suitable openings. Statistics reveal that only 2.3 percent of women occupy top administrative positions.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Malaysian women have the liberty to choose their spouses, but often accept advice from their family on compatible choices in terms of education, career, and social standing. Dating starts around the age of 17 or 18 and is accepted in urban areas. Schools, colleges, restaurants, and Internet dating services are some of the common places where boys and girls meet. The legal age for marriage is 16 for women and 18 for men.

Polygamy is allowed with judicial permission. Women's rights campaigners are continuously staging protests against judicial recognition of polygamy, which usually jeopardizes the property rights of women.

Women generally retain their maiden name after marriage, but in certain ethnic communities women may adopt their husband's surname, even though they are not required to do so. Women are allowed to acquire property and to own it separately from their spouse.

Some fishing communities consider a woman "incomplete" if she does not bear children; otherwise there is no stigma attached to childlessness.

Women can file divorce petitions on specific legal grounds like ill treatment, impotence, failure of maintenance, and disappearance of their husbands. The divorced wife is entitled to alimony or an equal share in the jointly owned property. She has also legal rights over her part of the family assets. While the Muslim community follows traditional Islamic law, Chinese, Indian, and other minorities come under civil laws in matters of divorce. The courts grant custodianship of children to the mother, but under Islamic law, the mother only gets custody of girl children until they are nine years old and the boys until they are seven years old.

Health

Malaysian women have reasonably good access to government healthcare services. State-sponsored health services cover about 98 percent of the rural population. The Health Ministry has given training to midwives that has enabled them to function more like professional nurses. The rural health services cover maternity and childcare, general hygiene, control of epidemic and endemic diseases, and general health education.

Working women normally get 120 days of maternity leave. Pregnant women are not allowed to work nightshifts, and they are not assigned difficult jobs that may affect their or their baby's health. The maternal mortality rate is very low in Malaysia, and the infant mortality rate is an average of 17 deaths for every 1,000 births.

Women are free to make their own health care decisions. A UNICEF report states that 55 percent of women use contraceptive measures. Oral pills are preferred by most women along with nominal use of condoms.

Interesting Social Customs

It is a Malaysian belief that a girl who sings in the kitchen is destined to marry an old man.

Women in Business

General View

Although it is an Islamic nation, Malaysia is one of the more progressive countries in Asia, and the growing export-oriented manufacturing economy has led to increased educational and career opportunities for women. Women constitute between 36 and 51 percent of the total labor force, and, while they are typically involved in lower-level manufacturing production, administration, and professional work, they are making inroads into middle management and traditionally male sectors like information technology.

That said, very conservative currents still exist in Malaysian society. The Islamic fundamentalist party PAS, for instance, that runs the state of Kalantan and is a significant political force in the country, consistently presents very controversial measures to erode the freedom and rights of women. One such "affirmative action" measure suggested that ugly women should be given preference in public service recruitment because beautiful women could easily find a husband.

Because women assume full household responsibilities along with their jobs and the fact that they face competition from Indonesian, India, and Chinese migrant workers, which keeps their wages low, continues to hold back the progress of Malaysian women.

Legal Rights

Malaysian women have exercised their voting right since Independence in 1957. The Federal Constitution of Malaysia treats women on par with men in all respects; this enables them to acquire or dispose of their property (as long as joint property is disposed of jointly). The country's law empowers women to launch their own enterprises and provides solid backing to run them successfully.

The Domestic Violence Act of 1994 criminalizes violence against women, but only if you are a married women. Discrepancies in pay structure do not exist in the public

sector enterprises, but women receive half the pay of men in the private sector.

Women in Professions

Nursing, teaching, and low-profile administrative/secretarial jobs are the common professional choices for women. A substantial number of women do part-time jobs in bookkeeping and home tutoring to supplement their family income. The efforts of the state to empower women with necessary occupational skills are gradually leading women to remunerative jobs outside of these traditional bastions. More women are capitalizing on the increasing opportunities emerging in the IT industry, for instance.

Some of Malaysia's prominent women business leaders include Yeo Kim Luang, chairman and managing director of Ecofuture Berhad, who was declared as the Woman Entrepreneur of the Year in 2005, and Datuk Mohaiyani binti Shamsudin, the chairperson of the Association of the Stock Broking Companies in Malaysia. Although the number of women members in political parties is high, representation of women in decision-making positions in the government and statutory bodies is around 15 percent, well short of the 30 percent target for female participation in government.

Few women also occupy the top-levels of corporate concerns (around 10 percent) although a survey predicted that 30 percent of the top positions will be occupied by women by the year 2020, and Razak Abu Bakar, author of the business book "CEO PR Kit, observes that women CEOs are going to increase ten-fold. So the future looks bright for Malaysia's businesswomen.

Malaysian women are prohibited from underground and industrial and agricultural work between 10p.m. and 5a.m. (without the permission of the Director General of Labor). In 2005, the first batch of 40 Malaysian women was inducted in to the Army's combat units. They can work only in administration and logistics, however, and cannot be sent to the frontline.

Traditional Muslim women are expected to strictly adhere to their religious dress code, while the non-Muslims are free to dress as they like. Many offices offer flexi-work hours to women where they can choose convenient work hours as long as they work for stipulated number of hours per week. Daycare centers and kindergartens are available to working women via the government and NGOs.

Women as Business Owners

Women own 16 percent of all enterprises. Mostly these are small or medium scale ventures in fishing, livestock rearing, agriculture, tailoring, forestry, and flower arrangement. A survey by the Department of Agriculture states that 1,175 small-scale business units are run by women. Women are also involved in retail trade and running restaurants. Government policies and banking support have increased the growth rate for women-run businesses, and a substantial number of women are now running manufacturing and manufacture-related units.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Address Malaysian businesspeople with their official titles and/or other appropriate titles (e.g., Dr.). Leave people plenty of personal space, and avoid relaxed body language like patting someone's back. Foreign businesswomen are advised to wear professional business attire.

Maldives

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The Islamic Republic of Maldives, a male-dominated society, confines women to their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Although society expects women to give their homes and families the first priority, many Maldivian women participate actively in the various economic, social, and political spheres of Maldivian society as well.

Maldivian society, highly patriarchal, condones men clearly dominating most areas of public and home life. Islamic *Sharia'a* law influences the treatment of women and girls in the Maldives. This law, liberal in many aspects, allows women to participate in outdoor activities, for instance, but limits their roles in certain areas. For example, it does not require Maldivian women to wear the veil, unlike their counterparts in many other Muslim cultures, and allows quite a lot of freedom with respect to venturing outdoors. The same Islamic law, however, does not permit women to hold the highest political office—the presidential office. (Interestingly, queens ruled Maldives before the advent of Islam.)

Maldivian women play a significant role in society, irrespective of their social and economic class, although women in the upper social and economic strata of society do enjoy better access to opportunities in various areas. The Maldivian government, as well as NGOs like National Women's Council, is taking steps to increase women's participation in the economy and in society in general.

Women do play a role, albeit a minor one, in Maldivian politics. The People's *Majilis* have 5 female members out of its 50 members, and the People's Special *Majilis* have 6 women members out of its 50 members. The Cabinet contains two women. No women judges exist in Maldives. Only a handful of women own and run businesses, as women remain poorly represented in the business sector. Maldivian women play a very limited role in the medical sector, which is dominated by Sri Lankan and Indian expatriates, with only a few working as nurses and midwives. The urban women of Maldives, especially around Male', noticeably differ from their rural counterparts, who have less access to health care, education, and employment. Women from various ethnicities (Sri Lankans, Indians, and Arabs) usually receive a little different treatment, depending on their cultural systems. However, all have to bow to Islamic law in public.

In keeping with traditional Islamic culture, Maldivian women usually dress conservatively. A typical Maldivian woman's dress consists of a full-length skirt wrapped around the waist, called a *feyli* or *kandiki*, and a dress with long sleeves to cover the upper body. With the steady influx of western tourists, fashion among today's Maldivian youth has changed, with many adopting Western styles of dress.

Legal Rights

The Maldivian Constitution grants women legal rights equaling men's in all respects. Maldivian women have the right to drive cars and were granted the right to vote in 1953, though this right came into force only in 1962.

Maldivian women hold the right to inherit and own property, but remain limited to half the amount of what males inherit, as per Islamic law.

Maldivian law prohibits abortion, except in cases that can be certified as medically reasonable, such as when the health and life of the mother face serious danger. The law grants permission to abort also, reportedly, if the mother has *thalassaemia*, a fatal, genetic disorder of hemoglobin, which affects about 20 percent of the population of Maldives. Even with this proviso, the disease affects about 1 in every 250 children in Maldives.

Maldives has one of the highest divorce rates in the world. The husband can easily divorce his wife under the provisions of the Islamic law. Women can apply to a court for divorce, providing they can provide acceptable reasons. Courts grant custody of children below the age of seven years to the mother, although the father can claim custody if he is able to prove ill treatment of the children by the mother.

Education

Women in Maldivian society have equal access to education, with primary school education being compulsory. Basic education usually starts with students learning Arabic in order to be able to recite the Koran. Most school teachers are women, and the country faces a shortage of qualified instructors. This has resulted in the government setting up a teacher training program with the goal of training local teachers. The easy access to education for Maldivian women is reflected in their literacy rate, which stands at 98 percent. This parallels the male literacy rate, the highest in South Asia.

Maldivian girls usually study up to the seventh grade, after which most of them drop out because their parents hesitate to send them away from home to attend secondary schools, mostly located on the bigger atolls. The situation differs for urban girls living in Male', with most of them completing at least their secondary education.

The Maldivian educational system usually provides the boys and girls instruction in separate schools or at least in separate structures. However, the increase in the student population and the increase in the number of private educational institutions have led to the establishment of coeducational facilities for older students.

Educated women in the urban areas encounter the same job opportunities as men, for the most part, although Maldivian culture ensures the maintenance of a certain level of separation at the workplace. Locale-related circumstances deny rural women the same access to employment opportunities that their urban counterparts enjoy, so most of them maintain a focus on agriculture and on taking care of their families.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Maldivian women usually choose their own spouses after obtaining the consent of their fathers. The practice of paying *mehir* (bride money), prevalent in the Maldives, necessitates that the bride state the required *mehir* and expect the husband to meet it. This *mehir* differs from a dowry in the sense that *mehir* money ensures the bride's future security.

Young men searching for a suitable bride visit houses with unmarried girls and ask for a glass of water. This test means to assess the girl's personality. The girls, in turn, offer "chew" (tobacco and/or betel or areca nut) to boys they find attractive. The chew gets passed from hand to hand until it reaches the boy.

The minimum legal marriageable age for Maldivian women is 18 years, though most of them first marry at around 15 years of age. Married Maldivian women do not take their husband's name after marriage, but retain their own maiden name. Women can hold property and assets in their own names, and continue to have this right after marriage.

With many Maldivian men migrating to other atolls in search of work or spending long periods out at sea, many women become head of the household by default. When the men are present, they have the final say in all matters, although women retain a lot of influence on important household decisions. Most rural women have large families and many children. Society generally views those remaining childless in a negative light.

Polygamy, though not widespread, is practiced in many areas of Maldives. Most often, society views it as a practice of the wealthy, and a law that orders courts to take stock of a man's finances before letting him marry another wife reinforces the idea of polygamy.

In the event of a divorce, the wife gets custody of the children below seven years of age. Courts usually ask children above the age of seven years to choose the parent they would like to remain with. After a divorce, fathers remain obliged to support boys until they reach the age of 15, and girls until they get married.

Health

Women have equal access to medical and healthcare facilities, although such facilities in rural areas offer quite poor health care. Most healthcare centers located in the atolls and islands suffer from a shortage of essential drugs, equipment, and medical personnel. However, Maldives has made enormous progress in various areas of health care and affords women free medical care during pregnancy and the postnatal phase. Family health workers and traditional birth attendants or midwives, known as *foolhumaas*, serve as the main providers of health care at rural medical centers.

Due to a safe motherhood program launched by the government, the maternal mortality rate sharply declined from over 400 deaths per 100,000 live births in the 1990s, to 97 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2003. The infant mortality rate stood at 18 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2003. Healthcare facilities handle about 60 percent of all deliveries in the Maldives.

Maldivian women can make their own healthcare decisions. Many couples, however, tend to make such decisions together. Easy procurement of various contraceptive methods such as condoms, pills, and IUDs does not seem to increase contraceptive usage, which remains very low among married couples in the Maldives.

Interesting Social Customs

Maldivian society has some unusual customs and laws pertaining to marriage and divorce. For example, custom allows a man to remarry right after a divorce, but a woman has to wait for a period of three months, or more accurately, three menstrual cycles, to ensure she is not pregnant.

Women in Business

General View

Traditional and patriarchal attitudes in Maldivian society encourage women to stay at home, and parents do not usually permit their daughters to enter the job market. If they do take a job, women generally avoid male-dominated businesses and professions like engineering, carpentry, and tourism. Typically, women are engaged in unpaid jobs of teaching children in religious schools, cooking for community events, tending *dhonis* (Maldivian boats), and processing fish, while they continue to perform their family and household duties.

However, with the efforts of government and the modernization of the economy, Maldivian women are experiencing a slow transformation in their societal roles, educational level, and economic activity rate.

Legal Rights

Maldivian women have had the right to vote and run for office since 1932. Although women can work in government jobs, politics, and the National Security Service, they are constitutionally barred from becoming the president or vice president of the Maldives. The Maldivian Constitution guarantees equal rights to men and women, but customary practices and disparities still prevail.

Traditional Shari'ah law (Islamic legal code), for instance, overrules constitutional protections and makes it impossible for women to buy or sell property on their own or to have equal inheritance rights (they get half the share that men get). Husbands can also easily divorce their wives (by saying *talak* three times), although pre-nuptial agreements protect women from such events.

Generally, female Maldivian workers receive equal pay for work of equal value alongside their male counterparts.

Women in Professions

The Maldivians are inextricably linked to the sea: fishing is the lifeblood of the nation. Maldivian women are traditionally engaged in home-based fish processing and preservation. They also have significant presence in subsistence agriculture (planting and harvesting crops) and craft-making.

Because of social restrictions, Maldivian women rarely enter male-dominated businesses and professions. Women represent a mere 6 percent of physics and engineering science technicians, 2 percent of architects and engineers, 2 percent of legal professionals, and 1 percent of tourism personnel. Nevertheless, women constitute 92 percent of pre-primary education teachers, one hundred percent of nursing and midwifery professionals, and a significant number of government employees. There are few women in top managerial or decision-making posts.

Some well-known businesswomen in the Maldives are Shaira Saleem, chairperson of the Women Entrepreneur's Council and proprietor of Sheri Private Limited, which provides beauty treatments and aerobics training for women; Abida Ford, proprietor of the Malé Clinic, a health center that offers complementary medicine, massage, and aromatherapy; and Khadeeja Hassan, executive director of the Maldives Monetary Authority (the country's Central Bank).

Traditional practices and limited access to higher education have relegated women to domestic and low-

paid jobs in the informal sector, but this situation is changing as more non-governmental organizations, women's organizations, and female political leaders work for the advancement of Maldivian women.

There are no dress code restrictions for professional Maldivian women. Women mostly dress in casual yet conservative clothing that covers most of their body.

In the Maldives, the absence of childcare centers and the slow disappearance of the traditional extended family support in childcare are posing a big challenge for working women balancing their career and family roles.

Women as Business Owners

There are very few women entrepreneurs in the Maldives. Women business owners are typically engaged in businesses related to fish processing, agricultural products,

and handicrafts, or they run eating houses, petty shops, and tailoring operations.

Inadequate business management training, a lack of access to capital, and strong gender role perceptions inhibit women's self-employment or growth in entrepreneurial activities. Measures to improve women's entrepreneurial activities, to develop their skills, and to involve them in more responsible jobs are ongoing in the Maldives.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Maldivians do a lot of business with foreigners due to their heavy reliance on imports and exports. They have a practical and welcoming attitude towards visiting businesspeople.

Business meetings are usually held in the mornings, Sunday to Thursday. Shaking hands is an accepted norm, even between the sexes. Foreign businesswomen should dress modestly in lightweight suits and avoid revealing clothes.

Mali

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Malian society is male-dominated, and women's role in society is usually restricted to being a wife and mother. Women do not appear much in public and are usually confined to private life at their homes. The husband is the head of the family. Most households are extended patrilineal families consisting of the husband, his wives, sons, their wives and children, and his unmarried daughters.

The percentage of women holding high positions in public is very low. In the 147-member National Assembly, there are only 15 women, and there are only five women in the 28-seat cabinet. Of the 33 lawyers in the Supreme Court, only five are women. In the nine-member Constitutional Court, there are three women.

Many urban women have been successful, however, in establishing small businesses with the help of local women's groups and foreign aid agencies. In rural areas, women have to work harder and have less access to healthcare facilities.

Urban women in Mali are more Westernized and hence have fewer dress code restrictions. Rural women, however, dress traditionally, and most women cover their heads in accordance with Islamic tradition.

Legal Rights

Malian women won the right to vote in 1956. The laws provide equal rights to women, but ignorance of the law and lack of education have prevented women from utilizing the opportunities available to them. In addition, discrimination against women persists in spite of their supposed equal rights. For example, women have the right to inherit and own property, but traditional customs discriminate against women so that men inherit most family wealth.

Abortion is illegal in Mali, regardless of the circumstances. However, various healthcare agencies are fighting for a more liberalized attitude towards abortions.

A Malian woman can initiate divorce proceedings against her husband if he fails to provide for her or if he does not pay the bride price at the end of the stipulated time. Due to ignorance, lack of education, and the high expenses involved, many women do not have access to legal services. In case of divorce, the courts usually grant custody of very young children to their mother.

Education

In Mali, public education is free, compulsory, coeducational, and secular. Although the Constitution assures women equal access to education, many women remain illiterate due to lack of resources and poor educational infrastructure. The female literacy rate is only 23 percent versus the male rate of 39 percent. In 1997, only 19 percent of school-aged girls enrolled in primary schools, compared to 32 percent of boys, and only five percent of girls received secondary education, compared to 10 percent of boys. The main reasons girls drop out of school are early marriage, house work, and the financial burden on the family.

Because few women in Mali complete their education, women's access to employment and educational opportunities is limited.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In Mali, marriage is seen as a union between two families; therefore, most marriages are arranged. In urban areas, dating is prevalent, while in rural areas it is not accepted yet. The individuals involved generally accept the choice of their families in selecting a marriage partner.

According to Malian law, girls can be married as early as 15 years of age, while boys can marry when they are 18 years old. According to available statistics, however, 22 percent of girls are married by the time they are 15 years of age, and the average age of marriage is 16 for women.

About 90 percent of Malians follow Islam, and Islamic law permits polygamy. About 43 percent of women and 24 percent of men live in polygamous relationships.

According to Malian laws, men are the legal heads of the family. The husbands make 90 percent of all decisions in the house.

A childless woman in Mali is considered a witch and is believed to bring bad luck to the community.

Malian men pay bride-money to their wives at the time of marriage. In case of a divorce, the woman must give back the dowry to her husband. If the divorced couple has children, the mother gets custody of them if they are very young. Otherwise, the father becomes the children's legal guardian.

Malian women have the right to hold assets separate from their husbands. Working women manage their incomes independently and contribute equally towards household expenses.

Health

Healthcare is given top priority in Mali. There are eight hospitals, and healthcare is free for pregnant women and children up to 12 years of age. Most women have access to primary health centers for information and pre-natal check ups. Village health care centers are cheap, and most women deliver their babies there. Nevertheless, Mali has a high maternal and neonatal mortality rate. UNICEF figures show that, out of the 1,200 women who get pregnant every day, 230 will develop complications and 20 will die.

All healthcare decisions in Mali are made by the husband. A woman even needs her husband's permission to go for a check-up or to pay for a prescription.

Urban women are increasingly using family planning methods to limit the size of the family. However, rural men are reluctant to practice family planning, as they feel that children are the gifts of Allah. Contraceptives are provided to women only with their husband's permission.

Interesting Social Customs

One unusual custom is the practice of *Allah Mand*, in which a woman is married to a witch doctor for family reasons. Another is the "betrothal at birth," in which the father of a newborn girl promises to give her in marriage to a particular individual or into a particular family.

Women in Business

General View

Mali does not have any major industries or businesses to speak of, and business opportunities available to Mali women lie mostly in the informal sector. Mali's population is overwhelmingly Muslim and follows Islamic social codes that often discourage women from going outdoors. Women of childbearing age are not encouraged to work outside the home and are expected to take care of the family. Post-menopausal women, though, have more freedom and can normally start and run their own businesses; but business activities for Malian women are usually restricted to agriculture and food processing. The number of women employed in the formal sector of the economy, which includes various government departments, state-owned companies, and private enterprises, is small, and these activities are mostly limited to urban women. It is estimated that Malian women make up only about 15 percent of the labor force, many employed by the government.

The role and status of women working in Mali is undergoing change, albeit very slowly. Any changes that seem to violate Islamic traditions meet with stiff resistance.

Legal Rights

Malian women were granted the right to vote in 1956. Mali's Constitution expressly prohibits gender discrimination of any kind. In fact, however, the day-to-day situation is very different. Practices involving owning and inheriting property and businesses are complicated because of social, religious, and cultural customs and rules. In large parts of Mali, people strictly follow the Koran and other Islamic teachings rather than Mali's Constitution. Polygamy, for instance, is a practice that is legal in Mali and sometimes severely complicates inheritance matters. Areas with a large Christian population are comparatively more progressive in the practice of allowing women to inherit and own property.

Women are heavily discriminated against in terms of compensation. An ILO study in 2001 showed a difference of more than 30 percent in pay packages of women and men working in the public sector. The figure was a little better for the private sector, with a difference of around 15 percent.

Women in Professions

As far as traditional jobs are concerned, the lives of Malian women can be classified into three distinct stages – pre-marriage, post-marriage, and post-menopause. Many unmarried rural girls go to cities to work as maids and gather articles for their own dowries. A woman at the post-marriage, childbearing stage is expected to take care of her family, tend to the children, and work in the fields belonging to her husband and his extended family. Once she reaches the post-menopause stage, a Malian woman usually has the freedom to start her own business or take some other job.

There are a few areas of the formal employment sector, such as law, where women find adequate representation. With female literacy rates at only 12 percent, it is understandable that not many women business leaders exist. The number of women in decision-making roles amounts to only about 10 percent of the entire population of working women.

One well-known Malian woman is Aminata D. Traore, the minister for culture and tourism, who also happens to be a businesswoman, psycho- sociologist, and artist. There are also a few women entrepreneurs who are slowly making their presence felt in traditional male strongholds, such as Mariam Jaras Dirassouba. She is a bank manager for a co-operative bank involving 260 women and has the authority to sanction loans.

A huge gap exists between the number of women working in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. Women make up as much as 81 percent of the informal workforce. They are not barred from any specific professions and are even allowed to join the armed forces. However, special codes do prohibit women from working any job that requires them to work a night shift.

Malian women normally dress conservatively, and laws prohibit employers from making women perform jobs that might compromise their modesty. Urban women usually adopt western fashions and may be more open to certain types of jobs when compared to their rural counterparts.

Since almost all Malians live as part of extended families, other members of the household such as grandparents,

older siblings and even co-wives assume childcare roles. State-sponsored childcare is not available in Mali.

Women as Business Owners

Few Malian women own their own businesses. However, the situation is slowly improving, with government agencies as well as local and foreign aid agencies focusing on helping more women become self-employed and start businesses. The most common type of businesses that Malian women engage in is selling agricultural and food products. Other businesses include manufacturing and selling garments, pottery, charcoal, handicrafts, and even beer.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Maliens have a reputation for being hospitable, and they like to cooperate with foreign businesswomen. Foreign

businesswomen are advised to dress modestly, in keeping with the cultural traditions of the Malian community. Touching between sexes, such as handshakes, is strongly disapproved of, and displays of affection or even anger are not appreciated. Avoid any appearance of personal relationship with a man. Keep eye contact with older people and employers to a minimum, since it can mean defiance towards authority figures.

Maliens consider it is impolite to point to someone with the index finger. One custom that foreign businesswomen may find strange is the practice of burping to indicate that one has eaten a satisfactory and full meal and also to compliment the person providing the meal. Informal behavior with elderly people is not advised, since Maliens could easily mistake it to mean a lack of respect, reflecting poorly on the foreigner.

Malta

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Legend has it that when Saint Paul was shipwrecked on Malta, he removed the venom from poisonous snakes and placed it on the women's tongues. This negative image characterizes the traditional view and treatment of women in Maltese society. Women were traditionally respected only as mothers.

Before 1981, women with government jobs in Malta's male-dominated society were expected to leave work when they got married, so they could stay home and take care of their children. This is changing, and women are increasingly valued in whatever other roles they choose to fill. Social or economic class has minimal effect on the position of women in Malta.

The Maltese Constitution adopted the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of gender in 1993. At the same time, some provisions in the civil code were updated, and parental leave, sick leave, and other changes were implemented. As a result, women's role in society has changed substantially in the past ten years and is still evolving.

Malta has the lowest number of women legislators of all EU countries, despite the government policy that every committee should have a female representative. Recently, women held six out of 65 parliamentary seats. About 13 percent of senior government officials were women, and two women were ambassadors. Women's representation in law and business is also low, though women are taking more and more jobs in media, journalism, and finance.

There are vast differences between rural and urban women in terms of dressing, values, and even speech. However, rural women are slowly adopting Western ways through exposure to satellite TV and the Internet. Many rural women are also leaving their villages for better educational and employment opportunities in cities.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for women in Malta, but clothes are often conservative, especially in rural areas.

Legal Rights

Maltese women have the same legal rights as men, including the right to vote and inherit property.

Abortion is prohibited in Malta, with no exceptions, even to save the life of the woman. The Maltese government lifted the ban on contraceptive advertising in 1974 and has allowed importation of contraceptives since 1975.

Divorce is not allowed under Maltese law, and there is no pro-divorce movement in the country. However, Malta may have to abide by EU laws on women's rights, which include the right to divorce.

Education

The government provides free education to all Maltese citizens, including girls and women, at all levels. All children between five and 16 years of age must attend school. Both men and women can take up free specialized vocational training in trade, commercial, or technical subjects. Women are concentrated in areas like languages and humanities and for the most part do not study mathematics, science, and engineering. However, there has been a change in this attitude over the last few years.

The female literacy rate in 2003 was around 93.6 percent, compared to 92 percent for males. The youth female literacy rate, for ages 15 to 24, was 97.89 percent. Most women graduate from secondary school, and increasing numbers of women are going on to university.

Education is coeducational at the pre-school and primary levels. State- and Church-run secondary schools are single-sex institutions.

Although the Maltese Constitution guarantees equal opportunities, women continue to be underrepresented in most sectors, particularly at the managerial level. Women's share of non-agricultural wage employment is 33.8 percent. Women are expected to choose jobs like teaching, healthcare, and publishing, which partly accounts for the wage gap between men and women. Eighty percent of the part-time workers are women, a reflection of their need to reconcile family responsibilities with work.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, Maltese marriages were like a contract between two families. This is changing, as most women prefer to choose their own life partners. Only people over the age of 18 are allowed to date openly. Young people meet through friends, family, or at school. Increasingly, women are delaying marriage until their mid- to late twenties.

Article 6 of the Marriage Act prohibits marriage if either person is bound by a previous marriage. There is no tradition of polygamy in Malta.

Women need not take their husband's name after marriage. For the most part, they are free to manage their households as they choose. Women can legally hold and manage property independently from their husbands.

Husbands, and even friends and other relatives, are likely to consider a woman a failure if she has no children. Small families are acceptable, though, and the total fertility rate is less than two children per woman.

Divorce is not legal, though divorces obtained overseas can sometimes be recognized in Malta. A couple can legally separate, in which case the husband must return the dowry, if any, to his wife and share property and other goods with her. People who are legally separated from their spouses may not remarry. Women often retain custody of their children in cases of separation.

Health

All Maltese citizens are eligible to receive free medical care, including hospitalization, general practitioner services, and community care. However, pharmaceutical products are not provided free. Women can take maternity leave during pregnancy.

Standards of care are very good, with skilled medical personnel attending the vast majority of births and an infant mortality for 2006 estimated at 3.86 per 1,000.

Abortion under any circumstances is prohibited in Malta. Apart from that, women can make their own health care and reproductive decisions. The use of contraceptives has increased and gained acceptance in recent years.

Interesting Social Customs

January, April and, August are considered "fertile" months, and are supposed to be the best times to get married. Delivery of the first baby is believed to be easier if the marriage takes place on a so-called star day, like Saint Lucy's Day.

Women in Business

General View

Maltese women have made great progress in the business arena over the last 20 years, thanks to several changes in laws, regulations, and even attitudes toward women's participation in business. These days, increasing numbers of women are entering professions once thought to be the domain of men, and many are even managing their own businesses. Nevertheless, most women take care of their families and often take up only part-time employment. The female employment rate in Malta is only 32.8 percent, much lower than other European Union nations.

The government is taking major steps toward empowering women in the business sector to increase their level of

participation. This includes joining the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and The European Social Charter.

Women are also increasingly taking up higher education in fields that enable them to attain employment in lucrative sectors on a par with men. Nearly 50 percent of university students are women, and women are increasingly taking up technical and vocational training. However, the proportion of women in non-science subjects like languages or humanities is still very high, at around 80 percent.

Legal Rights

Maltese women are granted equal rights with men. This includes the right to own, manage, and inherit property. They are also given some benefits in the work place in terms of sick leave, maternity leave, pensions, and insurance. The difference in the pay for men and women in similar jobs is one of the lowest of the EU countries at just four percent.

Women in Professions

Although many women are still in traditionally "feminine" professions like teaching and nursing, there are some who are now participating in business and other male-dominated areas. That said, there are still very few women in decision-making roles in the public and private sectors. In 2005, just 15 percent of people in managerial positions were women, which is one of the lowest among European Union countries.

Some of the most prominent women who hold high corporate positions or own their own businesses in Malta are Rosanne Galea, President, Galea Insurance Brokers Ltd.; Catherine Bonello Sullivan, Honorary President of Adam Advertising and Marketing Ltd.; and Claudine Cassar, Alert Communications Ltd.

Maltese women are not barred from any professions including the armed forces. However, women have to give their consent in writing in order to work at night in factories from 10p.m. to 5a.m.

Free government-sponsored kindergarten services are available for children between the ages of three and five years old, and the government also gives incentives to private sector companies to provide childcare facilities in the workplace. However, many women depend on grandparents and other family members to take care of their children or opt for part-time employment.

Women as Business Owners

In 2004, just 4 percent of employed women were running their own businesses in Malta, compared to about 35 percent in Greece and 26 percent in Poland. Women-owned businesses tend to be smaller and simpler, mostly concentrated in the services sector. The situation for women has improved over the last decade now that they have more access to credit facilities from banks to start their own businesses.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Maltese businesses generally follow the Western business culture, and foreign businesswomen are welcome. Businesspeople generally exchange business cards at the first meeting. You may use a person's first name after asking whether it is all right to do so. Although there is no particular dress code, you should dress decently and elegantly, preferably in a business suit.

Mauritania

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The traditional society of the Islamic republic of Mauritania has always considered women subservient to men. The culture expects hard work, passivity, and obedience from women. Although Mauritians venerate their mothers, women face widespread gender discrimination in all aspects of life.

The strong patriarchal society has always denied women access to education, and women seldom have any say in decisions regarding weddings or social ceremonies. Deep-rooted traditions have relegated women to familial responsibilities and have subjected them to domestic violence, detrimental practices such as female genital mutilation, and sexual harassment.

Mauritanian women have a low representation in politics, with only 5.4 percent of seats in the Senate and one woman minister in 2002. They have a significant presence in the health sector, where three out of five nurses are women.

Since independence in 1960, women have struggled to overcome their many social, cultural, and psychological impediments by forming co-operatives and participating in the women's trade fair held every year in Nouakchott.

The Secretariat of State on the Status of Women, formed in 1992 and headed by a woman, has developed various policies to augment the participation of women in the political, economic, and social life of the country. While urban Mauritanian women have gained many of their legal rights, rural women still become victim to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriages. The socio-economic status of women affects their access to education and privileges, but women of all ethnic groups and classes experience discrimination to varying degrees.

Traditional Mauritanian women wear a *malaffa* (a long cloak wrapped loosely around the body from head to toe). In south Mauritania, women usually wear dresses or skirts and blouses. They also wear long robes called *boubous*.

Legal Rights

The Mauritanian Constitution of 1991 assures women equal rights with men and forbids gender discrimination of any kind. Women got the right to vote in 1961. They also have the right to drive cars, own businesses, and work in the government.

Islamic laws influence inheritance practices in Mauritania, so women typically receive only half the property inherited by men. Societal pressures compel many women to give up their inheritances, since wives are regarded as belonging to the husband's family after marriage. In some groups, the brother of the deceased inherits all the property, including the widow, in order to keep the children and property within the family.

Legislation prohibits abortion except when the pregnancy causes a threat to the life of the mother.

The French anti-contraception law of July 1920, which prohibits the importation, manufacture, sale, advertisement, or transport of contraceptives, is still in force in Mauritania, but the recent reproductive health program of the government permits men and women to use contraceptives.

Women have the legal rights to initiate a divorce, and they usually receive custody of their children.

Education

Mauritanian legislation of 1991 guarantees women equal access to education. The government has made at least six years of primary education mandatory for boys and girls between six and fourteen years of age.

The literacy rate for women is 32 percent, compared to 52 percent for men. Only half the students enrolled in elementary school go on to attend secondary school. Generally, girls tend to drop out of school to help their mothers with household activities, to take care of siblings, or to get married.

Despite the legal provisions for equality, most educated Mauritanian women do not have the same job opportunities as men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In Mauritania, parents usually arrange marriages with the consent of the couple. Urban women have more liberty than rural women to choose their marriage partners. The prevailing Islamic culture disapproves of dating and expects women to congregate separately in social gatherings.

Mauritanian girls are normally married off early at the age of fifteen. Following Islamic law, women generally retain their maiden names after marriage. The Islamic *Shari'a* law permits polygamy, and women do not have the right to refuse their husband's wish to marry several wives.

Although the number of households headed by women has increased because of labor migration, the culture still considers men the economic providers and decision-makers of the family.

Mauritanian culture requires all adults to marry and have many children. The social stigma attached to childlessness makes women who do not have children feel excluded from society.

The 1991 Constitution grants women equal property rights and permits them to own, buy, or sell their possessions at will. In case of a divorce, in which a man is at fault, the wife retains the bride price. Upon divorce, the court normally awards the custody of children to the mother. According to traditional laws, a husband must support his wife and young children until they grow up.

Health

The Mauritanian Constitution guarantees women equal access to all healthcare services. However, 70 percent of the population does not have access to proper healthcare because of the lack of adequate personnel and modern equipment. The location and cost of private health centers

and pharmacies in urban areas also limits the access of rural and poor women to adequate medical facilities. Only 23 percent of childbirths in rural areas occur in health care centers, compared to 82 percent in urban areas. This is one of the reasons Mauritania has such a high infant mortality rate, of 69 deaths per 1,000 live births.

The government has initiated the national health policy, which concentrates on prenatal and postnatal care, vaccination, reproductive health care, combating harmful practices (such as female genital mutilation), and prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Generally, women need the consent of their husbands to make health care decisions. The lack of knowledge about and access to birth control has resulted in a low rate of contraceptive use.

Interesting Social Customs

Girls are force-fed to become “fat and beautiful” and suitable for marriage. This often results in obesity and related health problems for women.

Women in Business

General View

despite the significant role of Mauritanian women in socio-economic activities, women have always been treated as subsidiary to men in Muslim Mauritania. Apart from their multiple traditional roles of a mother, wife, teacher, servant, and so on, women help men with agriculture and livestock. They also participate actively in trade. Various government policies and labor migration have recently helped women to venture into new areas of work.

Legal Rights

The Mauritanian constitution guarantees women equal rights with men in all aspects of life – political, social, and economic. Women have the right to vote at the age of 18 and can stand for elections.

Constitutionally, women have equal rights to own, administer, and freely dispose off their property. Inheritance practices in Mauritania, however, usually follow a tradition by which a male receives double the inheritance of a female. Patriarchal attitudes often deprive a married woman of her inheritance entirely. Sometimes the brother of the deceased inherits his wife to keep children and wealth within their family.

The law assures women equal pay for equal work. In reality, women receive lower salaries than men, except in the civil service and the state mining company. Mauritanian women are also granted family benefits, including three months of maternity leave.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Mauritanian women have participated in agricultural activities and in the informal sector as traders. Women also play a considerable role in marketgardening, processing of milk products, and in livestock farming and fisheries. A few women practice traditional medicine.

Mauritanian male-dominated culture usually excludes women from leadership roles in socio-political and economic sectors. Very few females have made individual accomplishments in business, though some women have held prominent political positions:

Aissata Kane, the first woman to participate in Mauritanian government in 1995, held the post of the Minister of the Family and Social Protection in 2005. After her retirement, she became a consultant for a woman and development NGO and the president of the Association of Francophone Women.

Aicha Mint Jeddán served as the Federal Secretary of the PRDS party in Kiffa, where she has formed a power base with her constructive work. Ms. Jeddán became the first woman candidate for the Mauritanian presidency in the polls in October 2006.

Fatimetou Mint Sid'Ahmed Ould Mouguoya serves as president of the Mauritanian Women Entrepreneurs and Business Owners (UMAFEC) and runs a shop at the Chinguetti commercial centre.

Oumou Kane Sao, a fashion designer with an international reputation, owns a chain of businesses in dressmaking, advertising, and telecommunication.

The government has provided women with increasing opportunities in health care, communications, police, and customs services the last decade, but change remains slow. Women are increasingly involved in the fishing industry, and several women's fishing cooperatives now exist. Mauritanian women are barred from night work in factories, mines and quarries, and some other establishments. Extended family members usually help with childcare. Women can also use public kindergartens, private kindergartens, and community nurseries.

Dress is conservative. Women wear loose-fitting clothes that cover most their bodies.

Women as Business Owners

Few Mauritanian women own their own businesses. Typically, women join together to form small groups called *towniyas* (traditional cooperatives). Members of these cooperatives produce or trade mats, tents, leather products, traditional artifacts, and small livestock. The government holds a women's trade fair every year where the products are exhibited and sold.

In order to provide enhanced credit facilities to women entrepreneurs, the Mauritanian Union of Female Entrepreneurs and Businesswomen has established three savings and loan associations to ensure the advancement of women in this sector.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Mauritanian businessmen are unused to women in positions of authority and may be cautious of foreign businesswomen. Some older Mauritanian men may even show reluctance to negotiate with a woman. All are likely to react poorly to commanding behavior in women, regardless of rank.

Foreign businesswomen planning to visit their Mauritanian counterparts should make their position and level of authority clear before arriving. Although it's common for men to shake hands, women should not attempt to shake hands with male colleagues, or indeed touch them in any way. Foreign women visiting Mauritania should be particularly careful to dress modestly in loose-fitting clothes. Always start business dealings with a small talk to establish a good rapport with your counterparts. Respect hierarchy and behave humbly to avoid offending your business associates.

Mauritius

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditionally, Mauritian women have played subordinate roles to men in almost all areas of society. Under Mauritius' strongly patriarchal system, a girl could not leave her home until she got married, and after that, she was expected to move into her husband's house and have babies.

The situation of women in Mauritian society has changed with the industrialization of the economy, however, and these days Mauritian girls and women lead better lives and are more aware of their rights. They are no longer confined to household chores and rearing children, and many women now work throughout the country's public and private enterprises. Some women are even obtaining managerial positions.

In the political arena, women occupy 17 percent of the seats in the National Assembly and 10 percent of Cabinet posts. In the judiciary, women make up 36 percent of judges and 54 percent of magistrates. According to 2002 statistics, the participation of women in the medical field was almost on a par with the men, with 2,948 women versus 3,381 men, although more women are nurses and most doctors are men. In the business sector, women tend to operate micro- and small-sized businesses.

The role of women in the urban and rural areas is noticeably different, with rural women having fewer opportunities in various areas of Mauritian society.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for Mauritian women. Dress styles, with modern Western-style clothing among them, reflect the rich diversity of the country's ethnic fabric.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of Mauritius provides women with the same legal rights as men and absolutely forbids gender discrimination in any form. Mauritian women were granted the right to vote in 1956. Women are allowed to drive, with some even taking jobs as bus drivers and conductors, a job that was once male-dominated.

Women are also allowed to own and inherit property. The Forced Heirship Rules, which determine inheritance customs in Mauritius, do not discriminate against women.

Domestic abuse of women, which was a major problem, has decreased since the passage of the Domestic Violence Act in 1998. Abortion is illegal, and the only situation where it is permitted is when the life of the woman is in danger. The Solicitor General must approve any abortion in advance.

Mauritian women have the right to initiate divorces on the same grounds as men. Women can apply for custody of their children in the event of a divorce, and in fact, most courts favor granting custody of the children to their mothers.

Education

The Constitution of Mauritius ensures that women have the same access to education as men, and the

government has made education one of its areas of primary concern. Mauritian boys and girls share the same classroom space, and the literacy rate for both men and women is 100 percent.

Schooling is compulsory for all children until the age of twelve, and education is free from the primary to the tertiary level. The highest enrollment rates for Mauritian girls are at the primary levels, and these rates decrease higher up the educational ladder. A majority of girls, however, complete their secondary schooling.

Educated Mauritian women have the same job opportunities as men, and women do not require the consent of their husbands to hold jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Mauritian marriage customs usually differ between various ethnic groups. These days, most women select their own spouses, although inter-ethnic marriages still provoke disapproval.

Young men and women these days engage in dating, usually beginning in their early teens. The most common places for Mauritian women to meet men are at educational institutions and social events. Online dating is also becoming more common.

The legal marriageable age for Mauritian women is 18, although it is possible to marry earlier with express parental consent. However, the median marriage age has increased to 24 years for women and 27 for men. Polygamy is not recognized under Mauritian law and is neither socially nor culturally accepted.

Mauritian women have equal rights to hold assets separately from their husbands. They also have the right to administer their property any way they wish, without interference from their spouses. Many Mauritian women are heads of their household, typically if the spouse is unemployed, is incapacitated, or has migrated in search of work.

A Mauritian woman may either keep her surname or use a combination of her own and her husband's surnames. Mauritian women do not retain their spouse's name after divorce.

Although the traditional roles of women required them to bear and bring up children, times are changing, and many women are postponing giving birth in favor of pursuing careers.

Mauritian women are entitled to a share in the conjugal property in the event of a divorce. They have equal rights in claiming custody of the children. If the child is very young and is still being breastfed, custody is immediately granted to the mother.

Health

Mauritian women have equal access to healthcare. Public healthcare is free and accessible to all. The government is also involved in providing healthcare services designed to meet the specific needs of women.

Maternal mortality rates for the year 2000 stood at 24 deaths per 100,000 live births. According to 2006 estimates, the infant mortality rate was 17.97 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Women have the right to make their own healthcare decisions, including those involving family planning. Mauritian women have access to birth control, with the government setting up centers to cater specifically to women's birth control needs.

Women in Business

General View

Women's involvement in the business sector of the Mauritian economy is undergoing rapid change. The government has brought in a host of laws and measures to increase women's participation, including training and production support, teaching of marketing and capacity building strategies, and various credit schemes that offer financing for setting up businesses. The creation of Export Processing Zones and the National Women Entrepreneur Council has further given Mauritian businesswomen a boost.

Mauritian women are generally not discriminated against when it comes to participation in the country's economy. Many women also take up jobs and have equal opportunities with regard to participation in various areas of Mauritian society.

Legal Rights

Mauritian women enjoy the same legal rights as men in all respects, according to provisions made in the Constitution. They were granted the right to vote in 1956 and have equal rights with men in respect to owning businesses and owning as well as inheriting property. They also have the right to administer their property in any way they wish, without requiring the permission of their husbands.

Mauritian women are prohibited from being discriminated against in pay packages, and that law is actively enforced; so, women and men earn the same amount for equal work.

Women in Professions

Traditional jobs for women include working in agriculture (sugar, salt extraction, cattle-raising, orchards, and tea production), baking, and handicrafts manufacturing (bags, hats, toys, dolls, doormats, and fancy jewelry). Women also have extremely high participation levels in teaching (representing the majority of primary school teachers), nursing, administrative work, and service jobs.

Government statistics indicate that one-fourth of all managers are women. There are also quite a few women who are heads of companies. Some prominent women in decision-making positions include: N. Ait-Laoussine, the non-executive director of Madagascar Oil Limited; Jaswanti Abacousnac, manager of Symbiosis Management Training Center; and Claire Némorin, the manager of Rogers Call Centre Solutions.

The outlook in Mauritius for women in business is very positive, with low unemployment rates and increasing numbers of women venturing into the job market and running businesses. Although Mauritian laws do not prohibit women from any profession, traditionally male-dominated sectors such as construction, transport, mining

and the paramilitary usually do not have women present. However, the government is encouraging women to take up opportunities in these sectors as well.

There are no dress restrictions that prevent Mauritian women from taking up certain jobs, although most women dress conservatively, especially in the workplace. Concerning childcare, most Mauritian women hire babysitters or housekeepers to take care of their children when they go to work. In certain ethnic groups where families live together in large households, relatives handle childcare duties. State-sponsored childcare is not available in Mauritius.

Women as Business Owners

These days, many Mauritian women own their own businesses. This has been possible due to efforts taken by the government in increasing awareness and providing support in various ways for women wishing to start their own businesses. Businesses run by Mauritian women tend to be in the informal sector, or they are micro enterprises that typically focus on manufacturing, agriculture, wholesale trading, retail services, restaurants, and hotels.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are treated with respect and friendliness in Mauritius. Since Mauritius is a diverse mixture of various distinct ethnic groups, take care not to offend any particular cultural group. What is expected in one ethnic group may be deeply offensive to another. Foreign businesswomen can be expected to face plenty of questions regarding their families and marriage, some of which may seem inappropriate or even irritating. It's not advisable for foreign women to go out alone late at night, especially on the beaches. Care should also be taken of one's valuables when at the beach, since theft is a growing concern.

Mexico

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The Mexican nation encompasses a contrast of affluence and poverty, natural splendor and urban blight. Social attitudes towards Mexico's female citizens mirror such contrasts. Some Mexicans confine women to the traditional role of homemaker, and others embrace the growing presence of women in all social and economic spheres. In both cases, Mexican society reveres the concept of the mother and relates mothers to the Christian *Madonna* figure (a symbol both of chastity and selfless support of one's children). In the first case, Mexican men believe women's selfless devotion to home and family warrants women an almost sacred place in the family, but they hold themselves to a different standard, maintaining absolute control over the family while practicing marital infidelity (the basic tenets of *machismo*). Those with a more modern attitude delight to see women holding full-time employment positions and assuming positions of authority within and outside of the family.

The latter group appears to be gaining ground, according to a 1995 national opinion survey in which the majority of those polled expressed that men and women should share responsibilities of family, childcare, and housekeeping chores. Lower-income, less educated, and more rural respondents tended to consider the performance of household tasks as the exclusive responsibility of women.

The role of women in urban Mexican society has undergone a profound change over the last 25 years due to a couple of major factors: the increasing numbers of women attending school in general, graduating from high school, and obtaining college degrees; and, the rapid growth in the female work force in Mexico, with more women between the ages of 20 and 24 taking jobs before starting families. Gains made over the last few decades reveal a five-fold increase in female enrollment in medical schools (50% in 1998, versus 11% in 1970).

The 128-seat Senate in Mexico seats 27 women, and 120 women sit in the 500-seat Lower House (24%). Two justices on the Supreme Court, one Cabinet member, and four members in the extended Cabinet are also women. In terms of business, women own 23 percent of retail businesses, 11 percent of manufacturing operations, 6.5 percent of oil and gas industries, and 2.5 percent of construction firms.

The Mexican Constitution and labor laws provide that both women and men shall have equal pay for equal work under similar conditions, but in practice, society pays women less. Women also hold lower-status jobs than men. Rural women suffer far higher rates of poverty, malnutrition, inadequate healthcare, and maternal and infant mortality. The life span of rural women proves a full three years shorter than that of urban women (69.5 years compared to 72.5 years).

In Mexico, a very socially and economically stratified country, access to education and employment opportunities differs, according to women's ethnicity and

class. "White" women (9% of all women) from the upper classes have a distinct advantage over the *mestizo* (mixed Amerindian and native) and Amerindian citizens (60% and 30% of the population, respectively).

No dress code restrictions exist for women in Mexico. Women generally wear European style clothing.

Legal Rights

The Mexican Constitution guarantees the complete legal equality of men and women. Mexican women have had the right to vote in national elections and to run for office since 1953. Women also have the right to drive cars, to inherit, own, or possess property, and the right to hold assets separate from their husbands.

Mexican women have the right to initiate divorces on many grounds, including adultery, cruel treatment, or simply the mutual consent of both spouses. Custody of children can be mutually decided by the couple, or it can be granted by judicial decision. Abortion, a criminal offense in Mexico, remains illegal. However, laws allow abortion in cases of rape or in order to save the pregnant woman's life. The debate on further liberalization of the abortion laws remains ongoing.

Education

Mexico provides free and compulsory education for all its citizens until 15 years of age. The federal government, the states, and municipalities, facilitate preschool, primary, and secondary education, with emphasis on vocational and technical training. In Mexico, coeducational as well as single-sex educational institutions exist.

The female literacy rate stands at 90.5 percent, compared to men's 94 percent. Women's average educational level is gradually improving, and women now comprise nearly 46 percent of college students. Increasingly, many urban and rural Mexican women enter the job market on equal terms with men.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Mexican women choose their own partners, mostly within their societal class, and get married after a period of formal engagement. Boys and girls start dating in their teens, usually with the consent of parents. The legal age for marriage is 18 in Mexico. Boys aged 16 and girls aged 14 can marry with their parents' permission.

Typically, a Mexican wife adds her husband's surname after marriage, so in case of marriage to a Martínez, she adds *de Martínez* to her first maiden surname. The culture accepts cohabitation, but rejects polygamy, which remains illegal. Some married women who are barren fear being divorced, maltreated, and taunted by their in-laws.

Traditionally, Mexican women take charge of all household and religious matters, and the male, the *jefe de familia* (chief of the family), wields the authority and responsibility to make critical social and economic decisions. On average, over 50 percent of men serve as *jefe*, compared to less than 9 percent of women. In the case of divorce, the custody of children can be decided by

the couples themselves, or it can be left to the decision of the courts. The courts grant the amount of child maintenance required. Children 14 years of age and older can choose the parent with whom they would like to reside after the couple separates.

Health

Mexico spends far less of its gross domestic product on the healthcare of its citizens than comparable countries do. Health insurance remains rare, with only half of citizens having some form of coverage. Public healthcare facilities stay chronically under-funded, and access to private, general and emergency medical care costs the average person a great amount. Preventive healthcare measures, however, work to provide good and basic health services, including granting food supplements to children below five years of age and to women. However, access to maternal health care remains limited in the countryside due to the shortage of trained personnel; physicians attend only 87 percent of all births. The infant mortality rate in Mexico records a modest 20 deaths per 1,000 live births.

With the best national family planning programs available in Mexico, women make their own healthcare decisions, including those regarding contraception, and thus help in controlling the country's population growth. Contraceptive use differs in Mexico, depending on education level and geography (with higher usage among the urban educated).

Interesting Social Customs

Mexico's idealization of women in the image of the *Madonna*, sometimes called *marianismo*, on the one hand involves the worship of the Virgin Mary as the ultimate example of selfless feminine devotion, but on the other asserts female moral superiority.

Women in Business

General View

The Mexican government has made progress in eliminating gender disparities in business and the professions over the last two decades, and there has been a steady increase in female participation in the Mexican economy to its current level of 34.4 percent of the total labor force (with the majority of women working as homemakers). Career opportunities, working conditions, earnings, and benefits for women in Mexico, however, still fall far below those of men. Men occupy more than three-fourths of the managerial positions in the public and private service sectors, and they earn 28 percent more than women, on average.

A study by the National Foundation for Women Business Owners revealed that 40 percent of businesswomen felt that they faced male discrimination, and only 14 percent did not. Many social organizations have been formed to combat gender discrimination, and labor unions are very actively involved as well. Blanca Lunca of Local 9 of SNTE, Alejandra Barrales of the Mexican Flight Attendants Union, and Bertha Lujan of the Authentic Labor Front are few of the visible women labor leaders who are fighting for better conditions for women in Mexico.

Legal Rights

Although Mexican law provides its women citizens the right to vote, to stand in national elections, and to inherit property, in reality, many women do not benefit from their rights due to social obligations and pressure.

Similarly, the law offers equal rights and employment opportunities to both sexes, with equal pay for equal work performed, but National Institute of Women statistics reveal that women earn half of what men earn at low-level positions, that salaried women earn 77 percent of salaried men workers' earnings, and that women only earn 65 percent of men's salaries at the executive level.

Women in Professions

In pre-industrialized Mexico, women traditionally worked in agriculture. Now 43 percent of women work in the service sector, 24 percent in trading concerns as clerks and street vendors, and 20 percent in domestic services (e.g., cleaning, childcare). In 1995, women held 20 percent of administrative and managerial positions, and this increased to 34 percent by 2001. Representation in professions has also increased to the point where women make up 25.3 percent of professionals.

Out of the 460 board seats in 37 Mexican companies, females only hold 20 director positions. However, the percentage of firms with at least one woman on the board of directors increased to 52 percent in 2001, and is indicative of the growing number of female business executives.

A few of the well-known female business owners and executives in Mexico include: Maria A. Aramburuzabala Larregui, vice chairman of the large brewing firm Grupo Modelo; Astrid Lagunes Padilla, head of Turisste Travel Agency; and Brenda O'Brien, owner of Pancho's Mexican Food.

All Mexican men and women have the right to free choice of profession and employment, but law does not permit any woman to work in unhealthful or dangerous jobs or in industries and commercial establishments after ten o'clock at night. Women may follow a formal dress code at the workplace, but there is no specific dress code restriction for women.

As for children, in Mexico, working parents of nuclear families widely use childcare services, and in extended families the relatives take care of the children. Infant Development Centers (run by the Mexican Education Ministry), the Mexican Institute of Social Security, and the Institute of Security and Social Services for Governmental Employees also provide early childcare and development services.

Women as Business Owners

The percentage growth in Mexican micro enterprises owned by women (24 percent in urban areas and 39 percent in rural areas) and the fact that one-third of the businesses owned by women are less than five years old are good overall indicators of the growth rate of women in business.

According to a UN report on women entrepreneurs, women own 23 percent of retail establishments, 11 percent of manufacturing businesses, 6.5 percent of oil and gas industries, and 2.5 percent of construction firms. Mexican women entrepreneurs are most widely present

in educational services (36 percent) and personal services (22 percent), as well.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although Mexico is known for its patriarchal domination, foreign businesswomen are respected and treated with politeness and professionalism.

During business negotiation, a woman should come across as professional and thoughtful in her speech and never give into pressure or bullying. When introduced to a man or woman, you will be expected to give a warm handshake as a symbol of trust and mutual understanding.

Mexicans get involved in business relationships only after building a good personal relationship and often rely on friends or professionals to vouch for a new business partner. A woman should be careful to invite a man for a business meal along with his spouse or colleague, and not alone. If you are invited to a Mexican's home, you are considered a trustworthy friend, which is vital to Mexican business culture. Do not discuss business on such an invitation, unless the host brings up the subject. During business visits to Mexico, women should wear conservative dress and footwear. Be aware that Mexican women, like other Latin Americans, often pay a lot of attention to their hair and make-up.

Moldova

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditionally, women in Moldova take care of the household and the family. In Soviet times, women commonly worked outside the home and comprised 50.1 percent of the total work force. In spite of the fact that many Moldovan women continue pursue a fair amount of education and work outside the home, discrimination against women persists. Moldova's society is paternal, and men maintain at least the appearance of being the decision-makers in most situations.

A Moldovan woman is fully responsible for managing her home and is expected to participate in organizing social gatherings, even if she has a full-time job outside the home. Social or economic class has a relatively minor impact on the opportunities available to Moldovan women. The position of women in Moldovan society is fairly static at the moment, in spite of government and non-government programs designed to improve their social and economic status.

The first woman representative was elected to the Moldovan parliament in 1990. After the last election, women held 21 of 101 seats in parliament and 2 of 19 in the cabinet. The Deputy Prime Minister, Justice Minister, and Deputy Speaker of Parliament were the highest-ranking female politicians. Roughly 40 percent of the legislators, senior officials and managers are women. Women make up 66 percent of professional and technical workers.

Urban women do have more job opportunities available to them, but both urban and rural women in Moldova perform the dual role of taking care of the family and working outside their homes. Women in the Roma minority, on the other hand, have limited access to education and healthcare services. As a result, they often marry in their early teens and lack the skills needed to get a good job.

There are no dress code restrictions for women in Moldova. Women's clothing is comparable to that in other European countries.

Legal Rights

The Moldovan constitution guarantees women equal rights. Moldovan women won the right to vote in 1978, and they also have the right to own and inherit property. Abortion is legal and can be performed by a licensed physician in a hospital or clinic on request.

Divorce can be granted at the request of one or both the spouses. Both parents have equal rights to the custody of children in case of divorce. If the children are above 10 years of age, then the court decides the custody of children by taking into account their wishes. In most cases, the mother retains the custody.

Education

Moldovan women's literacy rate is quite high. About 98 percent of the total female population in Moldova is literate, compared to 99 percent of men. About 63 percent of the students who attend colleges are women. In 2000, 78 percent of girls were enrolled in primary school, 70 percent went on to secondary school, and 33 percent attended college. Almost all schools in Moldova are co-educational.

Women make up about half of the Moldovan workforce. But, in spite of their education, Moldovan women usually occupy lower-level jobs. Women, for the most part, receive equal pay for equal work, but because few hold high-level positions, women earn only 60 to 70 percent of what men do.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In Moldova, both men and women are free to choose their partners and marry. Moldovan women normally date before marriage, usually starting in their mid or late teens. Women and men meet at school, work, events, and parties, or other social gatherings. The minimum legal age for marriage in Moldova is 16 for women and 18 for men. Most women marry in their early to mid 20's. Long-term relationships and children outside of marriage are becoming more common in Moldova. Polygamy is illegal and is not socially accepted.

A Moldovan woman can keep her family name after marriage to take the family name of the husband or to combine both the names of her family and that of her husband. Moldovan women are normally in charge of

their own households and in the case of divorce, the mother is usually granted custody of her children while the father has to pay support. Both husband and wife have equal right to the property acquired during the marriage. In addition, women have the right to own the property they brought to the marriage as well as property acquired through inheritance. Having children is important in Moldovan society, so a woman is considered unlucky if she is childless.

Health

Although the Moldovan law provides women equal access to basic healthcare, the healthcare system is inadequate overall. Recent estimates put the maternal mortality rate in Moldova at 48.3 per 100,000 women, well above the average rate for the rest of Europe. Poor living conditions contribute to these high mortality rates as much as lack of medical care.

Women make their own healthcare decisions. Although family planning is promoted in Moldova, it is not widely used, especially in rural areas. Only about 62 percent of married women of childbearing age use contraceptives, and abortion is a commonly used method of birth control.

Interesting Social Customs

Traditionally, a Moldovan woman is careful to avoid certain things during pregnancy to protect her baby from evil spirits. Once the baby is born, its first bath is an important Moldovan ritual. Only women may bathe a new baby. They use pure water with milk and honey and add flowers and money to symbolically purify the child and bond the newborn to its family.

Women in Business

General View

Moldovan women are highly literate and are active participants in the Moldovan economy. Generally they are employed in jobs requiring fewer professional skills and qualifications than men. In state-run enterprises, salaries are generally low but jobs are secure. The number of women who work in the private sector or have their own businesses is very small.

The government of Moldova has taken steps to prevent discrimination against women in employment opportunities. Although laws have been created to improve the lives of women in society, these laws have not been fully implemented due to general conservatism of the state, which does not favor women.

Legal Rights

According to Article 16 of the Moldovan Constitution, all citizens are equal before law irrespective of race, sex, language, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, or wealth. In Moldova, women won the right to vote in 1978. Article 43 of the Constitution also guarantees the right of women to own and inherit property.

Even though the constitution provides for equality before law, there is wide difference in the pay between female and male employees. The average pay of a woman is only 60-70 percent of the average pay of a man.

Women in Professions

In Moldova, women are traditionally employed in the fields of education, health care, and services. A large number of women also occupy administrative and secretarial jobs. Moldovan women had more freedom in employment during Soviet rule.

The number of women active in politics and occupying high positions is very low in Moldova. Women hold 16 percent of the total seats in Parliament but make up 40 percent of all legislators, senior officials, and managers in the government.

Well-known female executives and business owners in Moldova include Tabarcha Ekaterina, who heads Beolcianka-Nord, a marketer and importer of industrial products; and Voroniak Marina Aleksandrovna and Aleksandra Kan, managers of Nahmanelli Co, a small-sized trading enterprise.

Women under the age of 18 are barred from working at night, and Article 248 of the Labor Code of Moldova prohibits the employment of women in harmful working conditions, underground, or in work which demand strenuous physical effort. There are no dress code restrictions for working women in Moldova.

The children of working mothers are usually taken care of by their grandmothers or other relatives. The Moldovan government does not provide childcare facilities to working women, due to the lack of resources.

Women as Business Owners

In Moldova, the number of women who run their own businesses is very small. Only 1-2 percent of big business owners are women. In mid-sized businesses of 20-75 employees, women make up only 10 percent of owners. In the small business sector, however, women run 40 percent of firms and their number continues to grow. Moldovan women generally run businesses connected with marketing (food products, medication, and clothes), the importation of industrial products, barter operations, and trading. Women also provide services like hair dressing and tailoring.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

A foreign businesswoman must ensure that a mutually respected colleague sends a letter introducing her to local businessmen before visiting Moldova.

Under Moldovan cultural traditions, one should not shake hands at the doorstep, and putting the thumb in between the first two fingers is considered a rude gesture.

Mongolia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Mongolian women traditionally held a higher social status than women in many Asian cultures. Still, a woman's primary role was as a homemaker. In more recent times, Mongolian women have faced challenges in the social, political, and economic spheres. Discrimination against women intensified during the post-Communist period.

Traditionally, Mongolia has always been a patriarchal society. Mongolian proverbs such as, "If a husband does not beat his wife once a month, he is not a man" and "Women's hair is long, but their minds are short" illustrate a negative attitude towards women. Women lose their jobs more quickly when the Mongolian economy is doing poorly. Some employers in the private sector are reluctant to employ women because they require benefits such as maternity leave. In addition, women carry the twin burdens of work and family responsibilities.

Since 1992, the position of women in Mongolian society has stagnated or even declined, in spite of laws protecting women's rights. That year, women's representation in parliament dropped from 25 percent to 4 percent, and though it has risen since then, women do not have the level of representation they enjoyed under the communist quota system. Mongolian women have low levels of representation in both politics and the judiciary. In 2005, 5 women held seats in the 76-member parliament. Women also occupied one ministerial and one vice-ministerial position. The current number of women in Parliament is far lower than it was even between 1996 and 2000. Mongolian women still occupy a fair number of mid-level positions in government and business but are rarely found in high-level decision-making positions. Women comprise almost 70 percent of all legal professional, but they make up only 17.5 percent of the Supreme Court's judges. Many Mongolian women work in healthcare sectors as nurses and other trained medical personnel. Women form a large part of the workforce in services and trade, besides venturing into new areas such as finance and real estate.

Urban women have better access to education, healthcare, and jobs. Rural women often have very heavy workloads; besides having to perform all the domestic chores, they are often engaged in food production and making handicrafts. All of Mongolia's ethnic groups have similar patriarchal traditions, so the treatment of women does not vary much from one group to another.

Modern Mongolian women wear western outfits, though simplified versions of traditional clothing can be found, especially in rural areas. There are no legal restrictions on what women may wear.

Legal Rights

The Mongolian constitution guarantees women equal rights in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres, as well as in family life. However, traditional practices inhibit the implementation of these provisions. Mongolian women got the right to vote and stand for elections in 1924. They also have the right to drive cars.

The Family Law that came into force in 1999 provided for women's equal rights to inheritance, land use, and ownership of livestock and other property.

Abortions are legal in Mongolia and available on request. A Mongolian woman can initiate divorce. In most divorce cases, the mothers get custody of minor children.

Education

Mongolia's laws provide women with equal access to education, including free primary and secondary education. The literacy rate of 97.5 percent for Mongolian women is almost equal to that of the men, which stands at 98 percent. More than three quarters of Mongolian girls go on to secondary education, and about 44 percent continue with tertiary education. Women far outnumber men at the university level, with the proportion of women in the country's public and private universities being 68 and 71 percent respectively.

Theoretically, women have equal access to job opportunities as the men, but, in reality, discrimination exists. Women tend to work in food service, education, and social services. They make up half the workforce, and many are the main providers for their families.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages are traditional in Mongolia, but for the last century, young Mongolians have become increasingly free to choose their own partners with minimal parental involvement. They normally marry within their own tribes. Dating is fairly common. Mongolian women usually meet men at schools, in the workplace, and at social gatherings. The legal marriage age for Mongolian women is 18, but most women marry in their early to mid 20's. Mongolian traditional society allowed polygamy as long as the husband could provide for each wife. However, polygamy was legally banned some time ago and is no longer practiced.

Women have equal property rights, but in reality it's unusual for women to hold assets separately from their husbands. Land reforms sidelined women by registering land in the name of the head of the household, who was invariably a man.

Mongolian women retain their names after marriage. In Mongolian traditional society, wives were normally a little older than husbands, and Mongolian men were considered immature if they did not listen to their wives. Today, Mongolian men often maintain the appearance that they are the family decision-makers, even if their wives actually make the decisions. However, the number of single-parent families headed by women is growing. Fertility is important in Mongolian society, so childless women usually experience social stigma.

Traditionally, Mongolian women could initiate divorce and remarry afterwards. In such cases the new husbands usually accepted a divorced woman along with her children, as acquiring a "ready-made" family was believed to indicate an existing spiritual connection. Today, divorce is relatively rare in Mongolia. In most divorces, mothers receive the custody of children and are entitled to child support and alimony.

Health

Mongolian women have equal access to the country's healthcare system. The socialist period saw improvement in the standards of healthcare, with the laws emphasizing maternal and child healthcare. More than 95 percent of all pregnant Mongolian women receive ante-natal care. As of 2004, the maternal mortality rate was 98 deaths per 100,000 live births. Estimated infant mortality rates for 2006 are 52 per 1,000.

Most Mongolian women are able to make their own healthcare decisions, and about 67 percent of married women of childbearing age use contraceptives.

Interesting Social Customs

Traditionally, Mongolians lived in tents called *gers*. The hearth was always at the center of the ger, and the entrance always faced south. Inside, the men's quarters, protected by heaven, were on the west side, while the women's quarters, protected by the sun, always fell to the east.

Women in Business

General View

Due to Mongolia's small population, women are a vitally important part of the workforce. Men and women have an equal place in the Mongolian economy and this equality carries over into the home. Women still tend to do more than half the housework and play the primary role in supporting the family, but the role of the Mongolian woman is undergoing rapid change.

An increasing number of women are taking up jobs in the public and private sectors. National programs have been implemented to address the special needs of rural women and to introduce advanced technology and create more job opportunities. Women's organizations have emerged to take up the cause of fighting for equal rights. Despite all of these initiatives, the privatization of the economy has shrunk the overall workforce and women have lost more jobs than men.

Legal Rights

The Mongolian Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Mongolian women were granted the right to vote in 1924. The Family Law provides for women's equal rights to inheritance, land use, and ownership of livestock and other property. Although gender-based pay discrimination is prohibited, it does exist, with women working longer hours and earning less pay than men for performing the same work.

Women in Professions

Mongolian women have a very high level of education compared to that of men and dominate the medical, nursing, teaching, and professional childcare sectors. More than 77 percent of the country's doctors and 60 percent of the lawyers are women. They also make up 67 percent of the general schoolteachers and 33 percent of the teachers in higher education.

Women constitute nearly 47 percent of the agricultural workforce and 46 percent of those in industry. Women occupy about 30 percent of the posts at the administrative and managerial levels.

One example of a famous Mongolian businesswoman is Enkhtuya, an enthusiastic woman who has been managing the front office of the country's only five-star hotel, the Genghis Khan. Another is Hatan Suih, who took a loan from the Women's Federation to set up a meat-processing business. Following her successful repayment of that loan, she obtained a bigger loan to establish a sausage factory and she is now one of the leading businesswomen in the country.

Mongolian women are prohibited from jobs with "harmful and heavy work conditions." Pregnant women may not work in jobs that expose them to chemicals, poisons, or extreme temperature variations.

Working mothers usually entrust the care of their children to members of their extended family, such as the grandparents. State-sponsored childcare facilities are unavailable in Mongolia.

Women as Business Owners

An increasing number of Mongolian women are starting their own businesses. The various measures and laws brought in by the government have given businesswomen a further boost.

Most women-owned businesses focus on the agricultural sector. Other women-owned businesses focus on the services and retail trade sectors.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are generally treated with special respect in Mongolia and have no problems conducting business there. Although most Mongolians speak Russian and an increasing number of them speak English, visitors should arrange for translators well in advance.

Morocco

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Moroccan women play an important role in perpetuating tradition and providing care for the family, but their role, even within the family, is usually secondary to a father's or husband's. In urban areas, Moroccan women sometimes work outside the home, but only occasionally achieve positions of power. Morocco is a patriarchal society; men and boys have greater freedom and more opportunities than women and girls.

Women generally have less status than men. Young girls are required to help with domestic chores and to care for their younger siblings. Traditionally, women are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and child rearing, and they often retain full responsibility for these tasks when they work outside the home. Wealthier women have better access to education and often go on to work in professional jobs. Poorer girls usually have to help around the house and, consequently, rarely complete secondary school, leaving them with limited options.

The changes to the family code in 2003 were designed to give women equal rights, and the position of Moroccan women is changing as a result. Thirty parliamentary seats are reserved for and held by women, but this amounts to only 10.8 percent of the seats in the lower house and 1.1 of the seats in the upper house. Half of all judges in Morocco are women. Women-owned or managed enterprises make up only 0.5 percent of the total enterprises in Morocco. But increasing numbers of women work in medicine, as well as in law and education.

Urban women and those on the coastal side of the country enjoy more freedom and greater access to opportunities. In the eastern part of the country, women lead circumscribed lives. There are no legal restrictions on what women may wear, and in urban areas a full range of western and traditional clothing can be seen. However, most Moroccan women dress conservatively, in line with Islamic laws and customs.

Legal Rights

King Mohammed VI signed into effect a new family code in 2004, granting Moroccan women equal rights in marriage, child custody, and divorce. The family code also placed restrictions on polygamy. Family and estate law, based on religious law, grants women only half as much inheritance as male heirs.

Women received the right to vote and run for office in 1963, and they can drive cars, and may own and inherit property. Abortion is legal only when a woman's life is in danger, or when her mental or physical health may be seriously compromised. The husband's consent, or, if he is unavailable, the permission of the chief medical officer of the prefecture or province is also required. Abortion is illegal in cases of rape, incest, and in any other situation.

Women can file for divorce under the new family code laws. It's common for women to receive custody of their children in cases of divorce.

Education

The Moroccan constitution grants all citizens the right to education and employment. However, in rural areas, girls are often kept at home to do housework instead of going to school. Women who manage to complete secondary school have equal access to tertiary education.

The adult literacy rate for females was recently estimated at 39 percent as compared to 64 percent for men. In 2000, 83 percent of girls enrolled in primary school, but only 28 percent went on to secondary school and 9 percent to college or university. Coeducation is an accepted norm in Morocco.

Today, many educated women choose careers in law, medicine, education, and government service, but few hold top positions in their professions. Women are about 35 percent of the work force and are concentrated in the industrial, service, and teaching sectors.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Although women are no longer legally required to have a marital tutor, a Moroccan woman normally receives permission from her legal guardian, most often her father, to marry. Parents exercise considerable influence over their children's marriage, though in less traditional families, women can choose their own spouses. Generally, men and women meet through family, at work, or at school. Online dating agencies are also popular. Dating is expected to end in marriage. Legal age for marriage for Moroccan women was recently increased from 15 to 18, and Moroccan women usually marry in their mid to late 20's.

Moroccan women retain their maiden names after marriage. They are usually in charge of the household and have a substantial say in matters affecting the family. When it comes to money, though, it's important for a man to have the appearance of authority, even if his wife made the decision. According to the revised family code, a man may practice polygamy only with the approval of his existing wife. Polygamy is socially acceptable, though less so in urban areas.

Children are an important part of Moroccan marriage and are considered good luck. Moroccan women have an average of 2.68 children, by 2006 estimates. Childless women are usually stigmatized. In a divorce, women are entitled to compensation. They can claim custody of children and receive child support.

Health

Women have the same access to healthcare as men, but in rural or remote areas of the country, health care services are often limited or nonexistent. Skilled attendants are present at about 63 percent of all births. The maternal mortality rate, at 230 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2004, remains high due to inadequate healthcare and lack of follow-up service. The infant mortality rate for 2006 is estimated at 40 per 1,000 live births.

To a certain extent, women may make healthcare decisions for themselves and their children. In traditional families, though, men are expected to provide their

opinion if any money needs to be spent on healthcare. About half of married women of childbearing age in Morocco use contraceptives. Illegal abortions are common in Morocco, and some women resort to abortion as a means of contraception.

Interesting Social Customs

In Morocco, women normally go out in pairs or groups. A woman rarely ventures out by herself, especially after dark. Bars and cafes are inappropriate gathering places for women, but it is acceptable for women, especially in groups, to frequent pastry shops or juice bars. It is always unacceptable for women to smoke in public, though it's common practice for men.

Women in Business

General View

Morocco is a relatively progressive Islamic nation whose Constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens; nevertheless, it has had little success in decreasing the discrimination faced by women or increasing their educational and employment opportunities. Over 40 percent of women work outside the home (25 percent in wage-based employment) but less than 40 percent are literate, a condition which severely limits their career options. Many well-educated women pursue careers in law, medicine, education, and government service, but few make it to the top echelons of their professions.

On the positive side, 50 Moroccan women have been appointed as state preachers as part of a government initiative to evolve a less fundamentalist version of Islam, women hold 11 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Representatives, and women's rights organizations are actively involved in addressing the issues of women in traditional society.

Legal Rights

Moroccan women have had the right to vote and run for office since 1956. Women do not, however, enjoy equal status under Islamic family and property laws. Inheritance laws grant women only one half of what men inherit on the basis of the assertion that women do not pay for domestic expenses, although statistics suggest the contrary.

The code of personal status, also known as the *Mudawana*, is based on Malikite Islamic law and governs the status of women under civil law. The code upholds the principle of equality between men and women and confirms joint responsibility for the family. However, the government itself ignores this code in its own practice of paying family allowances to government workers. When both spouses work for the government, for example, the family allowance is only paid to the husband as "head of the family" and not to the wife.

Gender inequality also exists in salaries, where women are paid half as much as men on average and about 35 percent less in the industrial sector. There is little or no disparity in large companies, however.

Women in Professions

Most women are employed in agriculture and fisheries and twice as many women as men work in these sectors. Jobs involve planting, transplanting, irrigation, pest control, harvesting, storing food crops, livestock

management, horticulture, and fishery processing. Manufacturing and domestic service are other common occupations. Some 17 percent of lawyers are women, and there are hundreds of female trial court judges. There are not many female heads of businesses in Morocco, although an increasing number of women are starting their own businesses.

Successful female Moroccan entrepreneurs include Narjiss Nejjar, a Moroccan film director, author, and founder of the film production company Terre Sud Films; and Dounia Taarji, the CEO of Conseil Déontologique des Valeurs Mobilières and co-founder of the Casablanca Stock Exchange.

Women are not barred from any professions, although labor legislation prohibits certain types of work considered hazardous to women. This includes firefighting, territorial administration, active service in the army, mining or underground jobs, and any jobs with hours between 1 p.m. and 5a.m. Certain public sector jobs in mail delivery and customs are still male strongholds.

Although Moroccan women aren't subject to any dress code restrictions, the choice of dress tends to depend on both age and occupation.

Older siblings, especially girls, usually care for children if the mother is working. Many families make use of household help such as maids, generally young women who are paid very little. State-run nurseries are available and admit children who are three years of age or older. A 2003 labor law requires day-care centers at businesses with more than 50 female employees, but very few companies adhere to this law.

Women as Business Owners

Of the enterprises Moroccan women own, 65 percent are in the service sector, 24 percent in industry, and 11 percent in agriculture and fisheries. Many of these firms are relatively young, with 81 percent of them incorporated between 1981 and 2001.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are treated with respect, but they are expected to maintain some distance in their relationships with their Moroccan partners. They are also expected to dress modestly and to behave with dignity.

Breakfast meetings are rare and lunches tend to run late. Moroccan hospitality is world-renowned, and locals usually entertain business associates in their homes. Although a growing number of the young, educated Moroccan entrepreneurs conduct business in English, it is a good idea to ascertain in advance if you will need the services of an interpreter.

Morocco, being a Muslim country, prohibits the use of alcohol during the fasting month of Ramadan. Segregation of the sexes is very important in almost every social setting. Saving face, especially in public, is of prime importance to the Moroccans, and they may resort to white lies in order to conceal a faux pas.

Mozambique

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Mozambique has gradually worked toward gender equality since its colonial-ruled times. The new Family Law redefines the status of women in society, and women now enjoy improved rights in areas of marriage, divorce, child custody, domestic abuse, and property rights, which should better equip them to fight the poverty and illiteracy that has held them back for so long.

Traditionally, rural Mozambican women served as homemakers who lived on income from farming, and urban women depended on wage labor. Over the years, however, these lines have blurred, with urban women working in farming, rural women working as wage laborers, and educated women pursuing diverse opportunities.

The status of women in Mozambique has improved since its independence, but a majority of women remain only involved in the informal labor force. Statistics also show that gender inequality in education remains a matter of concern as well. In the late 1990s, the Ministry of Education launched a program to increase literacy levels, help people break away from their traditional beliefs, participate in maternal health programs, and create a structure for training and wider education. In 2006, women held 34.8 percent of the seats in the lower house of Parliament.

While women in rural areas continue to support their families and work as wage laborers, women in urban areas stay confined to their homes or pursue professions on the basis of their education. Many organizations encourage women in rural areas to acquire skills in sewing, crocheting, embroidery, knitting, and traditional beer making, and to sell their products.

The ethnic groups in the South follow a patrilineal system while those in the North follow a matrilineal model. Major differences between the two systems affect marriage and inheritance traditions.

In rural areas, Mozambican women still wear their traditional attire, including a distinctive head scarf, indicating the ethnic groups to which they belong. In urban areas, women wear Western outfits. The Muslim women of the North maintain their traditional conservative dress.

Legal Rights

The Mozambican Constitution pledges that all citizens, equal in the eyes of law, should enjoy the same rights and duties irrespective of race, sex, religion, ethnic origin, or social standing. It also states that men and women shall be treated as equals with regard to political, social, economic and cultural affairs.

All citizens, regardless of gender, have a right to vote, to drive, and to own and inherit property. Due to customary practices, however, women have not been able to full enjoy the inheritance rights guaranteed constitutionally. In the event of divorce, a woman loses all her rights to her husband's property; furthermore, in the order of inheritance rights, her position on the inheritance ladder usually affords her the bottom rung—she comes last. A few years ago, the

African Union enforced the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. Under this agreement, women gained the right to abortion in the case of rape, incest, or when pregnancy threatens her life; additionally, the agreement considers all forms of violence against women criminal.

Women in Mozambique have the right to sign prenuptial agreements. Under customary law, women did not have the right to divorce or to demand custody of children. The law now entitles those who face domestic abuse or suffer infidelity a right to divorce. It also entitles women to claim custody rights as a means of supporting their families.

Education

Access to education remains a matter of serious concern in Mozambique. Schools in Mozambique follow a co-education system. In 1997, the population census revealed that only 39.6 percent could read and write, and that only four percent of the total population had attended high school. Another study, in 2001, revealed only 23.6 percent of women in Mozambique as literate, versus 59.3 percent of men. Further government research shows that girls form only 42 percent of the school population in the primary level, 36 percent in the secondary level, and 20 percent at the university level. Gender inequality in education, therefore, presents a very challenging issue. The low enrollment of girls in schools and the high percentage of women dropouts directly correspond to traditional practices that encourage women to groom themselves as homemakers rather than pursue an education.

Although no law exists that grants more job opportunities to men than women, men tend to earn more than women. Women have a harder time finding jobs than men, but continue migrating from rural areas to urban areas in search of employment.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In Mozambique, members of a woman's family generally arrange her marriage. Nonetheless, dating proves a common practice in urban areas of Mozambique, especially in the capital, and online dating agencies now help men and women to make dates. No particular law dictates the age when women start dating; rather, the situation depends on the practices of the ethnic group to which they belong.

In general, women shake hands with men as a form of greeting; otherwise, men and women do not touch each other unless involved intimately. Men hug each other out of familiarity or friendship, and women kiss other women upon greeting or saying goodbye.

Child marriage, once a common practice in Mozambique, forced girls to marry at an early age of 14 despite a high risk of premature birth, miscarriage, and other health concerns. The Family Law increased the minimum age to 18 for girls and boys to marry. Still, nearly 21 percent of girls marry by the age of 15, and 57 percent marry before they turn 18. Many couples live together outside of wedlock.

In 1981, the government established monogamy as the only legal form of marriage. In Mozambique, a married woman may choose to retain her maiden name, or use it with or without her husband's surname.

Some in Mozambique's Moslem-populated areas in the North still practice polygamy, and the number of wives a man has serves as his status symbol. About 19 percent of Mozambican women between ages of 15 to 19 are involved in polygamous relationships. In these situations, the spouses (as many as four wives) all share ownership rights over property and can decide where to live according to the Constitution, which mentions that all wives in a polygamous relationship shall be treated equally to inherit property in the case of their husband's death.

The old Civil Code stated that a man automatically qualified as the head of the family and women needed consent of men (husbands, fathers or the eldest male relative) to seek jobs. The new law, however, allows either partner to be head of the household and allows a woman to seek a means of earning income without permission from her husband.

Barren women in Mozambique face societal stigma because many African women believe childlessness emerges out of evil spirits or witchcraft.

Until the introduction of the Family Law, women lost the right to inherit property in the case of divorce. Women now enjoy joint rights over property and can seek half the share of property. Women also share joint custody rights.

Health

Health care for women presents a daunting challenge in Mozambique, where only 40 percent of the population has access to health services, 74 percent of deaths are attributed to delay in seeking timely medical care, and 44 percent of births take place in nursing homes or hospitals. Generally, women do not make their own healthcare decisions. In 2006, Mozambique had an infant mortality rate of 129.24 deaths per 1000 births, among the highest in the world. Such high mortality rates result from a lack of transport, poor medical facilities, lack of maternity wards, and superstitious beliefs. Of the women who do arrive at a health facility, 47 percent wait for more than a day to receive any aid. Rural areas, in particular, face shortages of medical facilities and professionals. In rural Mozambique, USAID funds projects to provide better medical services and helps to reduce infant and maternal deaths.

The government provides family planning services through its hospitals and health centers. Education about the importance of birth control and safe sex has contributed to the fact that 87.7 percent of all women now reportedly use contraception.

Interesting Social Customs

Along the coast of Mozambique, women generally do not go too close to the boats that men use for fishing in the ocean, and do not fish themselves. They only process and sell the catch collected by men.

The lobolo (bride price) ceremony involves many complex rituals and negotiations between the two families being joined in marriage. One interesting ritual in the ceremony involves the bride wrapping her head in a capulana (a piece of cloth) and guests paying to see the bride's face.

Women in Business

General View

Mozambican women face serious impediments to improving their employment and financial outlook. Over 90 percent of women contribute to the agricultural

economy (compared to 66 percent of men), and chronic poverty, substandard healthcare, and high illiteracy ensure that the vast majority of rural women will continue to rely on agriculture as their only means of livelihood. Urban women have a presence in narrow light industry sectors such as garment and shoe manufacturing and food processing (including the primary cash crop, cashews) and in self-employment in the service sector, where they are concentrated in informal trade and educational services.

Although there are women's organizations and international aid agencies that have taken up the cause of Mozambican women, their economic outlook is bleak.

Legal Rights

The Mozambique Constitution grants women equal rights in all spheres of political, economic, social, and cultural life. In 1975, women were granted the right to vote. Formal property laws established the equality of women, but traditional customs discriminate against them with regard to land rights. They have access to land and property only through their parents, brothers, or husbands. Upon divorce, a woman tends to lose access to all of her husband's property.

Mozambique's women receive lower pay than men for the same work. Women engaged in agriculture are typically unpaid, but even paid female laborers earn lower wages than men.

Women in Professions

Most of Mozambique's women are involved in subsistence agriculture. The rest are concentrated in trading perishable commodities in urban consumer markets, where they sell cold drinks, charcoal, and agricultural produce; a few engage in intermediary or wholesale trade. In the informal sector, women have also established themselves in sewing, embroidery, knitting, batik, and traditional beer-making.

Male dominance in top management posts in Mozambique persists and there are very few female heads of companies in the country. One example of a successful female entrepreneur in Mozambique is Rita Lazaro, a small businesswoman in central Mozambique who employs three people to extract sesame and sunflower oil.

Women are not legally barred from any professions, although they are prohibited from working at night from the fifth month of pregnancy through the first six months of nursing. There are no dress code restrictions that prevent women in Mozambique from taking up certain jobs.

Typically women take the responsibility of childcare. They customarily tie their babies to their backs with a piece of cloth and take them to the fields where they work. Most of the women's projects provide flexible hours and on-site childcare facilities. State-sponsored childcare is unavailable in Mozambique.

Women as Business Owners

A vast number of urban women are self-employed, and studies show that women in the South are generally more entrepreneurial than those from the North.

Most women are involved in micro- or small-scale agro-based industries. They have a presence in the trading sector selling food, produce, and other household consumables.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Mozambique's people treat foreign businesswomen cordially. Establishing a good personal relationship is a vital component to any business negotiation, so people typically indulge in some small talk before beginning serious business discussions. A public display of emotions, especially negative ones, is considered

inappropriate. Visitors generally shake hands upon meeting. Men and women do not touch each other unless they are intimate.

Women can dress casually in skirts, blouses, or dresses. Foreign women should not walk alone on any beach in Mozambique.

Myanmar

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

A Myanmar woman is traditionally responsible for her family's well-being, while her husband earns a living. In spite of this paternal attitude, Myanmar's customary laws, traditions, religious beliefs and practices all protect the rights of women in areas like marriage and inheritance, so the overall position of women in society today is good.

Young women from wealthy or prominent families generally have less freedom than poor or middle-class women of the same age. Wealthy parents sometimes prevent their daughters from taking jobs, especially if working means moving away from their families. There are no independent women's rights organizations in Myanmar, and the position of women in society is not undergoing any major changes at this time.

In 1990, when the National League for Democracy party won the general election, Aung San Suu Kyi would have become the country's first female Prime Minister. Instead, the election was nullified and Suu Kyi has been under house arrest almost ever since. Today, there are no women in the State Peace and Development Council, the cabinet, the Supreme Court, or indeed in any influential government posts. However, 50 percent of doctors and 90 percent of nurses are women. Women do hold positions as judges, lawyers, law officers, business entrepreneurs, and executives, but in far lower numbers than men.

Rural women have fewer opportunities and sometimes must travel to urban areas to find work. Women in ethnic minorities, especially non-Buddhists, face additional discrimination. There are no specific restrictions on dress for women in Myanmar, but clothes are generally modest and conservative.

Legal Rights

Legally, women have the same rights as men. Myanmar women have had the right to vote since 1935 and the right to contest in elections since 1946. Women can drive cars, and a woman's right to inherit, possess, or acquire property is both legally protected and very much ingrained in Myanmar society. Abortion is permitted only to save the life of the pregnant woman. Women may initiate divorce and can seek custody of their children.

Education

The Myanmar constitution guarantees equal rights to education to both genders. Most girls attend primary school, but fewer go on to secondary school or university.

The literacy rate for adult women is 86 percent, compared to over 90 percent for men. Almost all forms of education, at all levels, are co-educational.

Although women do work in a relatively wide range of jobs, there are few women in traditionally male-dominated fields. Women are more commonly involved in education, medicine, and unskilled work. As in many other countries, women do not always receive equal pay for equal work in Myanmar, even though the law dictates that they should.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Myanmar women usually have the freedom to choose their own husbands, although matchmaking traditions do exist and parents may sometimes weigh in on the decision if they can. Young people in Myanmar normally socialize in same-sex groups, though men and women meet at work, at school, or through family or friends. The legal age for marriage is 20 years, but the average age at which women marry increased from 21.2 years in 1973 to 26 years in 1997, compared to men's figures of 23.8 and 27.6. Though polygamy is permitted under the law, it is rarely, if ever, practiced.

Traditionally, Myanmar people do not have a family name. A woman retains her own name for life, whether she marries or not. Myanmar women are responsible for running their own households and can usually make decisions about spending and other matters without reference to their husbands.

Married women are expected to have children, and infertility can be grounds for divorce. Under Myanmar law, a woman has the right to hold assets jointly with or separate from her husband, and in case of death of the husband, the wife inherits the property. In a divorce, the joint property of the couple is normally divided equally, but if the wife is dependent on her husband, she gets only one-third of the joint property. Typically, the custody of male children is given to the father and female children to the mother, but the wishes of the children are also considered if they are old enough.

Health

The government guarantees equal and full access to medical services to all citizens of Myanmar, including women and children. There are maternal care centers in most areas of Myanmar. Skilled medical professionals attend more than half of all births. The infant mortality rate for 2006 is estimated at a little fewer than 62 per 1000 live births. Recent estimates of maternal mortality are about 230 per 100,000.

For the most part, women have the right to make their own healthcare decisions. Abortion is illegal, but the illegal abortion rate was 80 per 1000 live births according to recent estimates. Modern birth control methods are not widely available, and, at last count, only about one third of married women of childbearing age used contraceptives.

Interesting Social Customs

Amongst some of the Padaung tribe in Myanmar, it is common for women to stretch their necks using brass rings. At five or six, little girls are fitted with their first neck rings. New rings are added every four years, usually up to nine times in a woman's life, though additional rings can be added if desired. The weight of the rings gradually presses down the woman's shoulders and vertebrae, making her neck appear longer.

Women in Business

General View

The party line is that equal rights and opportunities are available to all citizens in Myanmar and the government is making steady progress in removing gender disparities in order to fully utilize the capabilities of its women in all fields. It is certainly true that women work very hard in Myanmar. The informal sector of Myanmar absorbs a very high proportion of women, and they participate in agriculture, petty trading, and hawking. The formal sector also provides wage-employment opportunities to women in skilled work like weaving, embroidery, and food production, although these opportunities are far more limited than in neighboring countries because of the country's economic isolation.

Legal Rights

According to the Myanmar State Constitution, men and women have equal rights in the political, economic, administrative, judicial, and social arenas. Women have the right to vote and contest in elections, to drive vehicles, and to acquire, own, or dispose of property. In practice, there is no functional democratic process in Myanmar and political opponents are subject to reprisals.

Myanmar women have equal opportunities in employment and they generally get equal pay for equal work.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Myanmar women have been engaged in nursing, teaching, farming, and domestic services, while they continued to perform their household responsibilities. On top of this, women are now entering the business world in areas like retailing, fashion, cosmetics, and public relations. The number of women gaining managerial and decision-making positions in the academic, public, and private sectors has also increased.

In the field of health care, Myanmar women play a leading role (representing 50 percent of doctors and 90 percent of nurses), and they also find employment in education, law, technology, and social work.

Among the well-known female business owners and executives in Myanmar are: Mra Thezin Nyun, the proprietor of Emerald Orchid, an international furniture company; Ma Hnin Pwint Phyu, a brand manager at Ever Seiko Co., Ltd. responsible for the distribution of the

Japanese cosmetics; and Ma Chaw Khin Khin, the CEO of Myanmar Computer Co. Ltd.

Women are prohibited from working in mines or other underground work in Myanmar under The Factories Act of 1951. Employment of women is also prohibited for strenuous jobs and jobs involving exposure to toxic substances.

There is no strict dress code for professional Myanmar women, but a formal and modest dressing pattern is followed at the workplace.

The majority of the Myanmar women who are in the businesses or professions continue to perform their household responsibilities, but in a few households where the women are working, especially with newborn children, the maternal grandmothers look after child rearing and training.

There are no state-sponsored childcare services available in Myanmar, but workplaces with at least 50 women usually have a special room, with women supervisors to take care of the children below six years of age.

Women as Business Owners

There is a gradual increase in the number of women entrepreneurs in Myanmar. Women are entering sectors of agriculture, livestock breeding, petty trading, tailoring, production, and tourism.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Doing business in Myanmar is not easy for men or women. However, foreign businesswomen who successfully navigate the required local and international regulations and paperwork needed to do business in Myanmar (not to mention other potential informal negotiations with the powers that be) will find local businessmen eager to accommodate them.

English is the most widely used language for business meetings. In terms of business etiquette, always address a person by his or her correct formal title. Casual dressing is accepted in Myanmar, but it is best to avoid wearing revealing clothes like sleeveless blouses and short skirts. It is offensive to touch a person on the head (the most precious part of human body) or to point at someone with the feet (the least sacred part).

Myanmar is controlled by martial law, and foreigners in the country need to obtain official permission to travel to certain areas.

Namibia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Namibian women are generally relegated to subordinate positions in society due to various religious and cultural prejudices. Gender stereotypes view women as dutiful homemakers and mothers, but rarely recognize their right and ability to take an active role in the country's economic life.

The government and many women's organizations are seeking the co-operation and active participation of influential religious groups to facilitate the empowerment of Namibian women. The government has undertaken several steps to give training, job placement, career guidance, and credit facilities to disadvantaged women.

The efforts of the government have seen a gradual increase in the number of women in various sectors of society. Recently, Namibia appointed its first woman judge and first woman ombudsman. Overall, women make up 23 percent of the National Assembly and 8 percent of the National Council.

Educated women occupy middle-level professional and administrative posts or own small or micro-enterprises. Women of the upper strata of society have better status than those in the lower stratum, who often become the victims of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and fatal diseases like AIDS. Rural women have less access to land, agricultural services and assets, natural resources, and employment.

The treatment of women also varies across different ethnic groups. *Owambo* society has always considered women inferior to men in all aspects of public and private life. Urban *Afrikaner* women enjoy more freedom than the rural *Afrikaner* women who behave like typical farm wives.

There are no dress code restrictions for Namibian women, who wear traditional as well as Western clothing.

Legal Rights

The Namibian Constitution assures women equal rights with men in all areas of life. Namibian women can vote at the age of 18 and run for elected office at the age of 21. The law permits women to own, buy, and sell all forms of immovable and movable property at will, and the recently enacted Married Persons Equality Act reinforces this right. The Married Persons Equality Act guarantees women equal rights with men in owning joint property, in accessing loans, and in divorce proceedings.

The Constitution allows women to obtain abortions in government hospitals with the approval of two medical practitioners on the grounds of a likely threat to the woman's life, physical health, or mental health; early detection of a deformed fetus; or when the pregnancy is caused by rape.

A woman can initiate divorce for reasons of infidelity, desertion, grave insanity, or the spouse's imprisonment for more than five years. Generally, mothers receive custody of children in case of divorce.

Education

The Namibian Constitution assures women equal access to education. The government has made primary education mandatory up to age 16. However, many girls drop out from schools due to teenage pregnancy or early marriage. On the positive side, more girls are enrolling in colleges and vocational training centers.

There is no remarkable difference in the literacy rates of Namibian women and men (82 percent for women versus 83 percent for men). Generally, boys and girls share the same classroom space. The Education Act of 2001 allows the private sector to open separate schools for boys and girls.

Although the Labor Act of 1992 guarantees women equal pay for equal work, in reality women occupy lower-paid jobs and normally earn less than men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Namibian women in some communities do not have much freedom to choose their husbands. They are often forced to marry older men or their deceased sister's husband. Widows are also compelled to marry their brothers-in-law to keep the wealth within the extended family.

Certain Namibian communities do not approve of dating; however, young people in urban areas like Windhoek do practice Western-style dating. The legal age for civil marriage is eighteen for women, but Namibian girls usually get married at the age of fifteen. Traditionally, Namibian women have taken their husbands' surnames upon marriage.

Although women contribute to the family by engaging in agricultural or other economic activities, men are perceived as the breadwinners of the family.

Namibian culture stigmatizes childlessness in women, who are expected have many children in order to prove their womanhood. Customary laws allow men to remarry if their wives are infertile.

Namibian women can initiate divorce on specified grounds. However, the customary law favors the "innocent" party, mostly men, and grants them most of the property in case of a divorce. Upon divorce, the custody of children depends on the kinship system, which varies for each community.

Legislation prohibits polygamy, but its incidence is high in some communities due to prevailing customary laws.

Health

Legally, Namibian women have equal access to the healthcare system. The medical care facilities of Namibia have improved since the country gained independence in 1990.

Urban women have better and easier access to reproductive health care services than rural women. Most urban women receive antenatal care and give birth to infants under the supervision of trained personnel, nurses, or midwives. Although the maternal and infant

mortality rate is high in Namibia, it has decreased over the years thanks to government efforts.

The country has also relaxed abortion laws and created awareness among young women about contraceptives and family planning. Although contraceptives are available, women need the consent of their husbands to make reproductive and family planning decisions.

Interesting Social Customs

Some communities in Namibia force women to undergo sexual cleansing after the death of the husband. According to this practice, a widow should have sexual interaction with a male relative chosen by the family. A woman cannot say no to such a practice for fear of being accused of bringing bad luck to the family. Some women become pregnant or contract HIV virus through this practice.

In some areas, women always kneel before male relatives (for example, while serving food).

Women in Business

General View

Most rural women of Namibia take part in pastoral activities in addition to their household chores and child rearing. Urban women who work outside their homes often have occupations in the service sector and professions such as teaching and nursing.

Namibia is a male-dominated society and, although the government has granted women equal legal rights, patriarchal attitudes and practices impede the realization of those rights and inhibit women's access to leadership roles. Recently the status of women has seen a slight change for the better because of the commitment of the government towards women's empowerment.

Legal Rights

The Namibian Constitution guarantees women equal rights with men in all political, social, and economic arenas. Women were given the right to vote in 1989, and all citizens can vote at the age of 18 and stand for elections at the age of 21 years.

The Married Persons Equality Act promises women an equal share in joint property, communal housing, and equal rights in disposing of such property. The Act also grants women equal access to bank loans and ownership of property without the consent of the spouse.

The Labor Act of 1992 prohibits sexual discrimination and harassment in the workplace and assures women equal pay for equal work. In reality, women mostly occupy low-paid jobs and average only 90 percent of men's average wages.

Women in Professions

Namibian women in rural areas take active part in subsistence farming and contribute much to the agricultural sector. Urban women have prominence in occupations such as administrative and clerical work, professional jobs (nursing and primary school teaching), trading, and service sector jobs.

Women rarely hold high managerial posts despite holding the right educational qualifications and legal provisions granting gender-equality. A few women, however, have broken cultural and societal barriers to become successful in business. Victoria Nicodemus, for instance,

is the former managing director of Namibia Wildlife Resorts and is the founder and executive director of the Executive Women Development Trust, which promotes the empowerment of women by the proper utilization of government policies and benefits. Another example is Rosy Ndafapawa Jacobs, a businesswoman and development economist, who serves as the director of Namibian Development Corporation and was the founding executive director of Urban Trust of Namibia. Anne T. Gebhardt is another successful woman entrepreneur who is the president of Women in Enterprise (Namibia) and the chairperson of the Joint Consultative Committee.

The efforts of the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have enhanced the growth of women in business, but Namibian women have a long way to go before gaining equality with men in all sectors, due to widespread gender discrimination and unequal access to credit and finance.

The law prohibits girls below 18 years of age and pregnant women (eight weeks before and after labor) from working at night between 8p.m. and 7a.m.

Namibians dress conservatively in formal clothes. Namibian women usually wear knee-length skirts or culottes, trousers, and dress blouses for work.

Working women seek the help of extended family members or group day-care centers for taking care of their children.

Women as Business Owners

Recently Namibia has seen an increase in the number of women entrepreneurs. Rural women are involved in subsistence farming, brewing, basket making, and the vending of cooked food. Most Namibian women run small or micro-enterprises in the textile and garment industries, tourism, agriculture, and fisheries. Lack of credit facilities, and the responsibilities of household activities and child rearing, encumber women's entrepreneurial activities and restrict them to smaller sized businesses.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

In conservative Namibia, foreign businesswomen may experience some form of male chauvinism. Foreign women should take care to dress modestly and discreetly.

Meetings usually begin with handshakes with both men and women. When making appointments, remember that offices have long lunch breaks and in winter some businesses close at 4p.m.

Namibians consider drinking and socializing a part of business culture. If you do not drink alcohol, accept an offer of soda or juice to avoid offending your host.

Nepal

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

A Nepalese woman's role within her family and society is determined by her husband's and parents' status. In almost all communities, women, especially the older ones, play an important role in making major household decisions. Nevertheless, women are subordinate in this patriarchal and male-dominated society. They often work much harder than men, both in the house and sometimes outside, to contribute to the family's well-being.

Nepalese women are often unaware of their legal rights. Customary laws and traditions teach at a very young age that women are inferior to men. Domestic violence, gender discrimination, and sexual assaults against women are common. Widows and divorced women fare worst because of discriminatory customs that often leave them destitute and without a place in society.

The status of women in Nepal varies depending upon their social and economic position, ethnicity, religion, and caste. To some degree, a woman's freedom is determined by her caste. Upper-caste women have limited public mobility because their behavior reflects upon the family's caste honor. Lower caste women, on the other hand, may take jobs and have greater freedom of movement.

In recent years, several initiatives from the government, non-governmental organizations, and other institutions have aimed to uplift the status of women by advocating their cause and providing them with education, training, and opportunities for development. Women are increasingly pursuing higher education, even though poverty and lack of resources have kept Nepal's literacy levels among the lowest in the world.

In politics, women represent about 6 percent and 8 percent of the seats in the lower and upper houses of Parliament respectively, with just one woman at the ministerial level. The same applies in law and medicine, where there are very few women practicing at high levels. Many women are self-employed or work in family businesses, but these are all on a very small scale. In 2003, the female economic activity rate was 67 percent of the male rate.

Urban women often help with the family business or perform other unpaid labor, and their contribution to the economy is undervalued. Rural women work the fields, care for the children, cook, clean, and perform other chores. This usually requires them to work longer hours than men, and studies show that Nepalese women die younger, in part because of their workload. Rural women are also subject to societal discrimination.

The role of Nepalese women varies between ethnic communities. In Tibetan-Nepalese communities and some low-caste communities, women enjoy more autonomy and better status compared to Indo-Nepali women.

There are no dress code restrictions for Nepalese women, though dressing styles usually lean toward the conservative. Nepalese women commonly wear saris,

salwar-kameez, or the traditional Tibetan wraparound skirt with a colorful apron. In urban areas, a few women wear Western-style clothes.

Legal Rights

The Nepalese Constitution guarantees equal rights to all citizens irrespective of gender, religion, color, caste or faith. Women received the right to vote in 1951. They have the right to drive cars, which has become socially acceptable to the point where a few women have become taxi drivers. However, women have disadvantages in inheritance and property rights because of traditional customs and societal pressures. Until recently, only unmarried daughters over the age of thirty-five were eligible to inherit parental property on an equal basis with sons. Although the law now allows daughters to inherit property, traditional ideas often prevail.

Abortions were legalized in 2002 and can be performed without spousal consent to protect the life, physical and mental health of the woman or child, or if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. Abortion is also allowed on request.

Women can initiate divorce on the grounds of impotency, adultery, polygamy, neglect, desertion or abuse. Though the laws grant women equal rights towards custody of the children, the reality is quite different.

Education

Literacy levels in Nepal are among the lowest in the world, with the female literacy rate standing at 34.9 percent in 2003, compared to 62.7 percent for men. In Nepal, 86 percent of girls attend primary school, but most of them drop out at higher levels because of poverty, lack of schools near their homes, and early marriage. Schools are co-educational.

Legally, educated women have rights to employment opportunities and equal pay for equal work. In reality, however, prejudices and discriminatory practices often prevent women from working at a level commensurate with their education. Laws discriminating against women still exist. For example, under the Foreign Employment Act, a woman must get permission from the government and her guardian before looking for work through foreign employment agencies.

Dating, Marriage and Family

The family elders typically arrange marriages based on caste, social status, and education level. Dating is rare, though not unknown, and love marriages have just started to gain acceptance among urban, educated families. Live-in relationships before marriage are seen only among Nepalese Sherpas.

The legal marriageable age for Nepalese women is 16, although child marriages are still common and considered auspicious. The average age for Nepalese women to marry in 2001 was 19.5, and people over the age of 20 may marry without parental permission. Most women take their husband's surname after marriage, though traditions vary between ethnic and religious groups.

Women are in charge of the household duties, and may also contribute financially by taking up jobs or joining the family business. In the Sherpa community, women manage households almost on their own, since the men frequently work away from home.

Nepalese women are expected to bear children and are considered unworthy if they do not. If a woman has not conceived after 10 years of marriage, there are legal grounds for divorce. Polygamy is now illegal and is becoming rare. However, a loophole allows men to remarry without divorcing a first wife who is infertile or disabled.

Married women can hold assets independently. Divorced women are entitled to just a very small portion of the property, known as *Mana Chamal*. In a divorce, the woman is entitled to monthly or yearly payments, in lieu of her share of the property. The mother also has equal rights to custody of the children.

Health

Healthcare services are not very developed in Nepal. As a result, maternal and infant mortality rates are high, and life expectancy is less than 60 years for women, compared to just over 60 for men.

Only 11 percent of Nepal's women give birth in the presence of trained medical personnel, with the remaining 89 percent giving birth at home with the help of friends, relatives, and untrained midwives. The result is an estimated maternal mortality of anywhere between 740 to 905 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to 2004 figures. Infant mortality rates for 2006 stand at 65.32 deaths per 1,000 live births.

A woman has the right to an abortion without her husband's consent during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. However, she needs permission to get contraceptives, which are only slowly gaining acceptance.

Interesting Social Customs

Exchange marriages are still common among some communities. For instance, when a man marries a woman he might agree that his sister should marry his brother-in-law, even if the sister is very young.

Women in Business

General View

Gender roles in Nepal are dependent upon social and economic status. Women belonging to higher-caste and more affluent families are more educated but tend to be more passive, opting for family life over employment. Women from lower castes and classes, however, play a larger role in the economy because they have to contribute to their family's income. These Nepali women work very hard, although often this work takes place on family farms in the informal sector. Despite their contributions to their families' welfare, women are still considered dependent on male members of the family (fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons), and discrimination still poses a major problem.

The status of Nepalese women is slowly improving with higher education standards and changing social customs that are bringing more women into the workforce. Several NGOs and institutions like the Federation of Nepal Cottage and Small Industries, the Rural Women's Development Centre, and the Women Entrepreneurs

Association of Nepal have facilitated the entry of more women into the business arena as entrepreneurs.

Legal Rights

Nepali women were granted the right to vote in 1951. They also have the right to education, employment, and business ownership. In practice, however, women are denied equal rights to inherit their parent's property on par with their male siblings. Daughters can inherit property only if they are unmarried and at least 35 years old by the time the property is divided. A woman can inherit her husband's property only if she does not remarry after his death. Divorced women are entitled to only limited support from the husband and none from parents.

Although the law entitles women to receive equal pay for equal work, there is a significant wage difference of around 25 percent between men and women for performing the same job.

Women in Professions

Agriculture is still the main source of employment for a majority of the population in Nepal. Rural women engage in collecting fodder, firewood, and performing household tasks. Only men take up economic activities like trading. In the urban areas, one can find very few women in high-level or technical positions. Most of them work in the low-skilled, low-paid jobs due to lower educational standards and cultural traditions.

It is estimated that women manage around 38 percent of Nepali enterprises. Even women from very low castes are breaking out of their social constraints and running businesses. One of these "untouchable" women is Keshu Pariya, a successful micro-business owner in the garment industry thanks to a loan from a U.N. program. Many women are migrating to urban areas in search of better educational and employment opportunities. They find jobs with the government or in small-scale industries like textiles, carpet weaving, or handicrafts.

Illiterate women are prohibited from taking up vocational training and are also prevented from serving as highly revered Buddhist *lamas*. Although dress styles in Nepal are usually conservative, no dress code restrictions exist that prevent women from taking up certain jobs.

State-sponsored childcare is unavailable in Nepal. Working women rely on the help of older children or extended relatives to take care of young children. There are also community childcare centers.

Women as Business Owners

There are quite a few businesswomen in Nepal, but they generally own and manage only small- or medium-scale enterprises, a majority of them being family businesses. Garment-making, handlooms, hosiery, and sericulture are some of the industries in which women owners are active.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Nepalese are very courteous towards visitors, especially women. Shaking hands is appropriate among educated, urban businesspeople, but otherwise occurs uncommonly between opposite sexes. Guests should wash their hands before eating and only eat with their right hand (if eating with one's hands as the locals do). It is also inappropriate to touch the rim of the glass to the lips while drinking water. Stepping over a person or touching them with the shoe is considered disrespectful.

Netherlands

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Contemporary Dutch women are somewhat more financially independent than other Continental European women. They make up 54 percent of the workforce, although about two-thirds of working women work part-time due to family responsibilities and the lack of adequate daycare facilities.

Women have strong representation in politics, holding 37 percent of the seats in the lower house and 30 percent of the seats in the upper house. They also occupy 5 of the 16 ministerial berths and hold 43 percent of all judicial positions in the country. A large number of Dutch women work in the medical field as nurses and doctors. In the business sector, an increasing number of Dutch women are becoming self-employed or starting businesses, although mostly small ones.

Women belonging to minority ethnic groups suffer from a degree of discrimination in the labor market. Research has indicated that women belonging to minority ethnic groups, especially Muslims, are also more likely to face domestic abuse than native Dutch women.

Dutch women generally like to dress informally. There are no dress code restrictions.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of the Netherlands grants women equal rights in all areas of society. Dutch women received the right to run for elected office in 1917 and the right to vote in 1919. Under Dutch law, both men and women can inherit property equally.

The revised abortion law of 1981 allowed women to terminate a pregnancy under the guidance of a qualified physician in a hospital or clinic licensed to perform abortions. The law also requires women to receive proper counseling regarding the health hazards of abortion and the alternatives available to them. The procedure cannot be performed until a six-day waiting period has elapsed.

Dutch women have the legal right to initiate a divorce. Generally, the parents have joint custody over the children. In some cases, the court may award the custody to one parent, with the other parent required to pay for the child's maintenance and support.

Education

Dutch women have equal access to education. The state has made education free and mandatory for all children between the ages of 4 and 16. Women in the Netherlands have a literacy rate of 99 percent, the same as that of men. Boys and girls share the same classroom space.

More than 90 percent of all Dutch girls complete their secondary levels of education, and a large majority of them go on to complete their higher education as well. Dropout rates are higher for boys than for girls.

Despite their high education levels, women do not enjoy equal opportunities and treatment in the workplace.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Dutch women have the liberty to choose their own marriage partners. Dating is common, and teenagers usually start dating via small group activities. Men and women can socialize at any place without restrictions from their families or society.

The legal minimum age of marriage is 18, and the average age at which Dutch women marry is 27. Monogamous marriages are the only ones legally recognized in the Netherlands.

These days, Dutch women do not take their husband's name on marriage and retain their maiden names. According to law, Dutch women can hold assets separate from their husbands.

Women are having children later in life (at around 30 years of age) and having fewer children overall. Childless women are not faced with any social stigma.

Upon divorce, the couples usually retain joint custody, sharing all the rights over the children. In cases where one parent is awarded custody, the other parent should contribute towards the maintenance of the children.

Health

Dutch women have equal access to the country's excellent comprehensive healthcare services. This is reflected in the maternal mortality rate of 7 deaths per 100,000 live births and the infant mortality rate of 5 deaths per 1,000 live births, both among the lowest in the world.

Since 1965, the Netherlands has provided family planning services as a part of general healthcare services. Dutch women have the legal right to make their own health and reproductive decisions. The easy availability of contraceptives has reduced the number of teenage pregnancies in Netherlands.

Interesting Social Customs

The Dutch have a custom of "spring cleaning" in which the homemaker empties the entire house at the end of winter and cleans everything in it, from the drapes to the furniture.

Women in Business

General View

Over 40 percent of workers in the Netherlands are women, but much of this work is part-time (70 percent of part-time workers are women) and in traditionally feminine fields. Changes to employment laws, increases in self-employment, and the creation of small businesses over the last two decades have helped to increase the role of women in the Dutch economy and to diversify the range of areas in which they are active.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of Netherlands guarantees women equal rights under family law, property law, and in the judicial system. Netherlands gave women the right to vote in

1919. Dutch law provides women with the right to own and inherit businesses and property.

Prostitution is legal and regulated in the Netherlands as a means of protecting women from exploitation by organized crime.

Employment discrimination based on gender was made illegal in 1994, but complaints based on gender are increasing as companies circumvent the law, especially in the hiring of executives (where only 4 percent are women). Only half of Dutch companies have women on their boards, and usually they have only one female director.

Despite legal provisions to the contrary, women still lag behind men in terms of income. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the wage differential between men and women is 24 percent.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Dutch women have found employment in clerical and healthcare occupations such as medical receptionists, nurses, and home helpers. A large number of Dutch women also work in professions such as marketing, media, catering, graphic design, environmental planning, and law. Dutch women also play an important role in textile production, where nearly 60 percent of “spinnings” are women.

Despite government measures to empower women, Dutch women rarely hold high managerial posts, particularly in the trade and industry sector. This is also partly due to the fact that their part-time job status puts many Dutch women at a disadvantage in terms of career progression. Nevertheless, women have made progress in their professions and some now hold high-visibility posts.

Among the many notable Dutch women leaders are: Barbara Kux, chief procurement officer at Royal Philips Electronics and the highest-ranked woman in the history of the 112-year-old Dutch electronics company; Karien van Gennip, the country's Secretary of State for Economic Affairs; Charlotte Insinger, the chief financial officer of Erasmus Medisch Centrum; and Marjan Oudemans, the director of Corus Nederland BV.

Women are not barred from any profession in the Netherlands and there are no dress code restrictions that prevent Dutch women from taking up certain jobs.

Most couples have at least one partner working in a part-time job so one parent is able to take care of the children. In some cases, it is the father who works part-time. The government has formulated policies to provide more childcare centers for the benefit of working women.

Women as Business Owners

Dutch women pursue entrepreneurship in order to balance their familial responsibilities and work. They typically own small-scale businesses in retail trade, catering, social services, industry, wholesaling, and transport. Women start one-third of the small businesses in the Netherlands, and that number is even higher among immigrants and ethnic minorities.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

The Dutch generally treat foreign businesswomen with respect. Communication styles are direct, with a lot of eye contact involved. They do not appreciate compliments or criticism in public, yet they like to hear honest views. Visiting businesswomen can invite a man for dinner and

pay the bill. Do not keep your hands in your pockets while talking to someone or shaking hands. Smoking is forbidden in many areas and so is chewing gum in public.

The Dutch usually shake hands or answer the telephone by mentioning their last names, instead of saying “hello.” The gesture of moving an index finger around the ear means that one has a telephone call and does not imply craziness.

Business attire is typically Western corporate style and a bit on the formal side. You can expect most men to wear suits and ties to work.

New Zealand

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

New Zealand is an egalitarian society. Gender, ethnicity, economic class and social status matter little. New Zealand women enjoy equality—or near-equality—with men in all spheres of life, with the same opportunities for education, career, healthcare, inheritance, and other fundamental rights.

New Zealand society was traditionally paternal, but today most women are autonomous. Although domestic violence, sexual abuse, and gender discrimination exist, they directly affect only a small portion of the population. There is also some segregation in employment, with more women than men in low-paid, unskilled jobs. Women from higher socio-economic and educational backgrounds are comparatively better off.

The government has introduced several initiatives to eradicate discrimination on the basis of gender in healthcare, education, representation in government, and self-employment. While some of these initiatives have proved effective, inequalities still persist in some areas.

New Zealand is the only country in the world that has had two women heading the government consecutively. Women's representation in politics is relatively high with 34 parliamentary members, nine executive council members, 20 ministers, and seven cabinet members. The Chief Justice is a woman, and more women than men—61 percent—take up law as a profession. Women's representation among District Court judges and High Court judges is 23 percent and 16 percent respectively, and women are major partners in large law firms. Women are also well represented in other professions like medicine. The rate of female entrepreneurship in New Zealand is 12.1 percent, the highest among the developed countries.

Studies indicate that rural women live longer, earn good incomes, and are well educated. The major issue for rural women is lack of access to healthcare. However, urban women have better employment opportunities in a wider choice of job sectors.

There are distinct differences between various communities, especially the Maori and non-Maori women. Maori women have lower life expectancy, higher mortality, higher fertility rates, poorer health, and are also more likely to be in a single-parent family. Their illiteracy and poverty rates are also higher.

Dressing is formal at work and casual otherwise. There are no particular dress code restrictions on women in New Zealand.

Legal Rights

New Zealand women enjoy equal rights to education and employment. They are entitled to receive equal pay, to inherit property, to undertake contracts, and to run businesses. They have had the right to vote since 1893.

Abortion is not available on request, nor is it allowed for economic or social reasons. Abortions are permitted to

save the life of a woman, to preserve her physical or mental health, in case of fetal impairment, or if the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest. It is also allowed in some cases if the woman is subnormal mentally or if she is too old or too young to have children. Only registered physicians working in licensed facilities may perform abortions.

Women can initiate divorce. They are also eligible to receive custody of the children upon divorce, either singly or jointly.

Education

University education was made available to women in New Zealand in the 1870s. Today, more women have tertiary education than men. Literacy rates among men and women in New Zealand are similar, at 99 percent, but are lower for Maori women. Men and women share classroom space at coeducational schools throughout New Zealand.

Although women have equal access to education, many still choose to study “feminine” subjects. Qualified women generally have the same employment opportunities as the men. Women still prefer jobs that leave them more spare time for their families. As a result, many women choose part-time jobs over full-time employment.

Dating, Marriage and Family

In a few ethnic communities—Hindus, Muslims, and Chinese, for example—senior family members arrange marriages for their young relatives. However, the vast majority of marriages in New Zealand are by choice,

Dating is acceptable and widely practiced. Women normally start dating in their late teens. Young people meet in educational institutions or at work. Online dating has also caught on in recent years.

For both women and men, the legal age for marriage is 16 with parental consent and 18 without. The average age for a first marriage among New Zealand women is much higher, though, at 27.3 years. Polygamy is illegal in New Zealand.

A woman in New Zealand can choose to legally assume her husband's name, use her husband's name informally while legally retaining her own name, or simply retain and use her own name. Married women can hold assets, run businesses, and own property independently. Women are often in charge of the household and responsible for the entire family.

There is no stigma attached to not having children, and some New Zealand women choose not to marry, or to marry and not have children. Some also postpone motherhood because of their work.

Divorced women are entitled to half of the marital property except under some specific circumstances. They are usually granted maintenance if they are not financially independent.

Divorced women can retain guardianship over adopted or biological children and have the right to make decisions on behalf of minor children. They can have custody, known as “day-to-day care,” of the children by mutual

consent. The family court may grant custody to either parent if the partners cannot decide by themselves, and in a majority of cases women get custody of the children. Women who do not have custody will be granted visitation rights and have to contribute child support.

Health

New Zealand women have good access to healthcare services, including free reproductive health services like prenatal and postnatal care. Facilities and physicians are available throughout the country, even in some remote areas.

The country's maternal mortality rate, at about 5 deaths per 100,000 live births, is one of the lowest in the world. Estimated infant mortality rates for 2006 stand at 5.76 deaths per 1,000 live births. The freedom that New Zealand's women have in making their own healthcare decisions, coupled with their high economic independence, has kept mortality rates very low and life expectancy rates high.

Women can also decide about family planning. Contraceptive use is high among New Zealand's women. Estimates indicate that about 72 percent of all New Zealand women use some form of contraceptive.

Interesting Social Customs

New Zealand was the first country in the world to give women the right to vote, and it continues to offer equal rights to all citizens.

Women in Business

General View

New Zealand's women have played an active role in its growth and continue to make a major contribution to their society and their economy in all fields and at all levels. Women have filled some of the most prominent positions in both the public and private sectors, including prime minister, chief justice, and governor general.

Women mostly head small to medium-sized companies, but there are a few at the upper echelons of large multinational companies as well. Kiwi women are hard at work, however, in laying the groundwork for full economic equality with men.

Legal Rights

Women from New Zealand were the very first in the world to get the right to vote back in 1893. Women have the rights to manage and own businesses, to conclude legal contracts, and to manage property independently.

Some differences still exist between the wage rates of men and women despite the Equal Pay Act 1972. One government study of public sector employees in 2001 found the difference to be under five percent and decreasing. Personal incomes of full-time working women are less than those of their male counterparts. Maori women are also more likely to face discrimination in wage rates than non-Maori women.

Women in Professions

Women hold around 36 percent of administrative and managerial jobs, while their share in technical and professional jobs is around 52 percent. Specific positions

in which women are predominant are those of clerks, sales people, technicians, associate professionals, and service providers. Maori women are generally employed in low-paying unskilled jobs.

In 2003, women made up 35 percent of New Zealand's doctors (although around 40 percent of these women were not born in New Zealand), and women made up half of all medical students. Women are similarly well represented in the law, where 39 percent of all lawyers are women, up from 24 percent in 1993; women also make up 62 percent of law school admissions. Women are still prohibited from military combat roles, but, other than that, the sky is the limit.

In terms of corporate directors, about one third of New Zealand companies have a minimum of one woman on their board of directors. Some of the most prominent women in business are: Theresa Gattung, CEO, Telecom Corp. of New Zealand; Rosemary Howard, CEO, TelstraClear; Dr. Nicola Crauford, Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Directors in New Zealand (Inc.); and Beryl Anderson, National President, National Council of Women.

There are no dress code restrictions that prevent women in New Zealand from taking up certain jobs. Dress styles in the workplace are generally Western and range from the formal to the casual. State-sponsored subsidized childcare facilities are available only for a few underprivileged families. There are, however, licensed private childcare centers, community preschools, kindergartens, play schools, and parent-run play centers. Working women also use the help of extended family members, domestic helpers, and their husbands to care for children during work hours.

Women as Business Owners

The rate of female entrepreneurship in New Zealand is highest in the developed world, at 12.1 percent in 2004 and growing at a rate of over 20 percent per year. Women represent around 38 percent of total entrepreneurs in New Zealand. Since many of these companies are relatively new, women own just 25 percent of the businesses that employ 100 or more full-time employees.

Women in the 25-34 age group and Maori women (as opposed to those of European descent) are more likely to become entrepreneurs. Women business owners are involved in almost all industry sectors and fields of activity. Around 50 percent of full-time women proprietors are organized as limited liability companies, while the other half represent partnerships or individual proprietorships. Surprisingly, women own and run only around 1 percent of New Zealand's many farms, although this may have more to do with the fact that family farms, in which women owners are active participants, are often structured as partnerships.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

New Zealand is one of the least corrupt nations in the world. Foreign businesspeople, especially women, are welcomed and treated with respect in New Zealand. New Zealanders value honesty, directness, and humor, which generate trust in a business relationship. Start off with a handshake and a smile, and stick to titles and surnames until your host insists on using first names. Negotiations can involve much discussion and deliberation. Kiwis prefer facts to hyperbole, sentiment, or high-pressure sales techniques.

Nicaragua

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditional values define the status of Nicaraguan women, who are expected to be dependent, submissive, and faithful. The Nicaraguan family is patriarchal and the father is the head of the household. Values for men depend on masculinity, and for women, on virtue. The culture idealizes women as homemakers and mothers.

Nicaraguan women often lead hard lives. Fertility rates are high, and women frequently work outside the home. Men flaunt their machismo through extramarital relationships, while women's freedom is often restricted in every area of life.

Women of low socio-economic status are burdened with domestic responsibilities, preventing them from benefiting from the economic opportunities provided by the State. The richest class of Nicaraguans does not even acknowledge the presence of the poor. Upper class women lead luxurious lives, while their poorer counterparts live in harsh, difficult conditions.

The Sandinista revolution sparked a national women's movement, and gender equality became an important part of the political agenda. The programs of the Sandinista government gave women access to health care and education. Women's participation in social and public activities rose significantly, and women made up the vast majority of teachers in the national literacy campaigns and health promoters in the national vaccination campaigns. The position of Nicaraguan women continues to change, and the Government of Nicaragua has prioritized national programs aimed at empowering women.

In politics, women hold 22 of the 90 seats in the National Assembly. In the judiciary, one of the seven Supreme Court of Justice members is a woman, and one of the five judges of the Supreme Electoral Council is a woman. Few women have careers in medicine, though a number of women work as nurses and nursing auxiliaries with only one year of training. In the business sector, more Nicaraguan women work in the informal sector, particularly in agriculture and seafood processing.

Rural women's lives revolve around caring for the household and farming. Their access to public facilities and opportunities in different economic sectors is limited. Urban women often have jobs and better access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

These are a few ethnic tribes in Nicaragua, such as the Miskito, Rama, Sumu, and the Creoles. The position of women in each of these ethnic communities is more or less the same as for the rest of the population.

There are no dress code restrictions and women wear both conservative and modern clothes.

Legal Rights

Women have the same legal rights as men in all areas of public and private life. Nicaragua adopted woman's suffrage in 1955. Though women have equal legal rights

to own and inherit property, the fact that land is precious in the eyes of Nicaraguans means that discriminatory practices exist, often preventing women from owning land or other assets.

According to Nicaraguan laws, only "therapeutic" abortions are permitted, primarily those performed to save the life of the mother. Consent from three doctors and the woman herself are required. Abortion for any other reason is illegal, but commonly practiced. United Nations estimates show that 16 to 21 percent of all pregnancies end in abortion in Nicaragua.

Women have the right to initiate divorce and have equal rights to the custody of the children.

Education

The state provides free, compulsory elementary education, with boys and girls studying in the same classrooms. The adult female literacy rate, at 77 percent, is similar to that of the males. Most Nicaraguan girls enroll in primary schools, but only a small percentage of them actually complete their primary education. Poverty and child labor are major barriers to girls seeking education.

Although the Constitution grants equal employment opportunities for women and equal pay for equal work, gender differences persist, with women sometimes earning only half as much as men in similar positions. Women constitute two-thirds of the informal economy and are concentrated in low-paid education and health service sectors.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Nicaraguan women choose their own spouses. Girls usually start dating at 15, and young people commonly date in groups. Social events, schools, and universities are places where men and women meet.

The minimum legal age for marriage is 18 for women. In fact, though, many marry much younger, especially in rural areas. In some parts of Nicaragua, 25 percent of women are married by the age of 15, and the median age for marriage is only 17. Women take their husband's last name in accordance with an old tradition that adds his surname with a "de" to the woman's name.

Nicaraguan fathers are normally the heads of the household, though seasonal migration for jobs may force women to assume leadership in the home. Still, women head 28 percent of rural households and 39 percent of urban homes.

As in most of Latin America, the belief that women are born for motherhood puts a lot of pressure on them to have many children. Children are highly valued in Nicaraguan society. Teenage pregnancy, both in and out of marriage, is common in Nicaragua.

Laws allowing joint title ownership by couples have given women more access to property. A law to allowing women to own separate property within a marriage is being considered.

In a divorce, women are entitled to an equal share of the property held by the couple. According to Nicaraguan

marriage and family laws, women have equal rights in matters concerning custody of the children. The court considers the interests of the child paramount while deciding on custody.

Polygamy is illegal and punishable with jail terms of up to five years.

Health

Among poor, uneducated women, only 32 percent have access to skilled birth attendants as compared to 93 percent of women in the highest income bracket. Estimates for 2006 indicate that the infant mortality rate is about 28 fatalities for every 1,000 live births, with the maternal mortality rate at 250 deaths for every 100,000 live births.

The Nicaraguan government admits that women are not permitted to make their own healthcare decisions and that men continue to decide whether or not women may use contraceptives. Contraceptive use is more common, about 64 percent, in the highest income brackets, and low, about 34 percent, in the poorest income group.

A recent Demographic and Health Survey revealed that one third of women with partners did not use any means of contraception. Because Nicaragua is a Catholic country, there is considerable opposition to birth control, resulting in high adolescent fertility rates even when compared to the rest of Latin America.

Interesting Social Customs

In spite of strong Roman Catholic influence, many couples do not marry in church or even have a civil ceremony. Common-law unions have the same legal status as civil marriages.

Women in Business

General View

Women have always made significant contributions to the Nicaraguan economy and account for 40 percent of the country's GDP. They also make up 80 percent of the employees in the country's micro-business sector. Many peasant women, who traditionally worked in the agricultural sector as unpaid workers, have moved into the salaried labor force in the cotton and coffee industries. In general, however, the contribution of women has remained undervalued, and they have fewer employment opportunities and higher levels of unemployment than men.

The Sandinista revolution encouraged thousands of women to work outside the home and introduced the concept of gender equality in the National Constitution. Women's organizations are working at the grassroots level to train Nicaraguan women in the various skills of business management.

Legal Rights

Nicaragua adopted woman's suffrage in 1955. Women were granted the right to jointly own land, and legislation permitting title ownership by women is in the offing.

Although the Constitution grants equal salary for equal work, salaries for male and female workers differed significantly, with men sometimes making twice as much as women. Even with similar educational qualifications, men progress more quickly than women in their chosen

professions. Reports also show that 'feminization' of jobs such as domestic work, education, and health care workers has led to lower pay and decreased job security for women.

Women in Professions

A majority of Nicaragua's employed women are concentrated in the service and trade sectors, including merchandizing, tourism, and tortilla-making. Generally, however, traditional jobs for women have been in the agricultural sector. Very few Nicaraguan women hold high positions in companies. One famous Nicaraguan businesswoman, however, is Abigail Brenes Tellez, who heads a pottery business and has successfully expanded her range of products.

The Constitution of Nicaragua guarantees equal opportunity in employment and Nicaraguan women are not legally barred from taking up any profession. In fact, many are actively involved in the mining industry. Nicaraguan women also have no dress code restrictions. The family serves as the most important domestic unit in Nicaragua, and the extended family provides childcare if the mother works, although state-sponsored childcare is also available.

Women as Business Owners

According to a report, 55 percent of Nicaraguan women own their own businesses. These businesses are concentrated in the micro-enterprise segment due to women's limited access to land, government assistance, and credit services. Women are mostly involved in planting, hoeing, sorting and packing pineapples, melons, and squash. Women also dominate field tomato production, poultry incubation, zero-grazing dairy operations, tree/plant nurseries, and fish/seafood processing and sales.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Nicaraguans are very friendly and at ease with foreign businesswomen despite the historically male-oriented society. Be careful, however, to keep business and friendship separate. A colleague or employee might expect special favors or considerations because of your friendship, so avoid any kind of favoritism, promises of assistance, or patronage. The discussion of politics should also be kept to a bare minimum.

Foreign businesswomen in Nicaragua can travel safely after taking the normal precautions. Nicaraguans are genuinely friendly, but seem a bit reserved at times. At an initial meeting it is quite all right to ask general questions such as where someone was born, whether they are married, and the like. It is recommended that a simple explanation about the purpose of the visit is provided at a first meeting. Good friends greet each other with a hug and/or a kiss. Less educated people are more nervous and stand-offish with foreigners.

Niger

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditionally, women in Niger have been confined to the roles of homemakers and farm laborers, and this remains the case for the majority of women. Women rarely leave their homes; in fact, *Hausa* women require their husband's permission to venture outside their homes and must sell their food and craft products through their children.

Niger's patriarchal culture expects passivity from women in the face of an array of traditional discriminatory practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages, domestic violence, and polygamy. However, an increase in educational levels and government action in recent years has seen some slow steps toward the emancipation of women in Niger.

The government has formulated several strategies, including a national policy for the development of women. Islamic associations, however, have raised some opposition to the drafting of a family code that guarantees gender equality and abolishes disparities.

According to law, women are guaranteed 10 percent of the seats in Parliament. Fourteen women were elected to Parliament in 2004, and 671 women have become municipal councilors. Currently, Niger has 6 female ministers in the cabinet and 6 women out of a total of 20 ambassadors. In the judiciary, there are 21 female judges, 3 barristers, 5 notaries, and 1 provincial bailiff.

Niger's women play a substantial role in business, though they are chiefly present in the informal sector. Niger is trying to increase female participation in the medical field by training and certifying traditional women healers in modern medical practices.

Rural women suffer greatly from traditional discriminatory practices in education, employment, and healthcare facilities in comparison to urban women. The position of women in Niger also varies according to ethnic group. For instance, women belonging to the *Djerma-Songhai*, the second largest ethnic group in Niger, marry in their early teens. The *Tuaregs* follow a matrilineal societal system, and their women enjoy comparatively greater liberty.

Women in Niger dress conservatively and wear long skirts or blouses. The society does not approve of short skirts, pants, or tight-fitting clothes.

Legal Rights

Although Niger's Constitution grants women equal rights, traditional practices inhibit women from exercising their rights. Nigerien women have the right to vote (since 1948), to run for elected office, and to drive. Inheritance practices are based both on statutory and customary laws, which often favor men. Women receive only a portion of land, but they seldom enjoy the right to their property.

Niger's laws forbid abortion except when the life of the mother is in danger.

Women have the right to initiate divorce on the grounds of domestic violence. In case of a divorce, the father is awarded custody of all children under the age of eight years.

Education

Niger has made six years of free education mandatory for all children. However, only 50 percent of children attend schools, and girls' enrollment is much lower than that of boys. Girls usually drop out from primary school in order to help their mothers with domestic chores and child-rearing duties or to get married. As a result, the literacy rate for women in Niger is just 10 percent compared to the men's literacy rate of 26 percent.

Educated women in Niger are denied equal access to job opportunities. This has resulted in a low representation of women in civil service and professional fields. Women rarely hold leadership roles.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In Niger, parents usually arrange marriages with the consent of the bride and the groom. Although the culture disapproves of men and women socializing in public, rural men and women can socialize in the evening when girls dance at the village center. Urban women have the opportunity to meet men at dances or weddings.

According to the civil code, the legal age at which Niger's women can marry is 15. However, rural girls often marry as young as 10 years of age. Women in Niger generally retain their maiden names after marriage.

Islamic law allows polygamy if the husband can provide equally for each wife. Polygamy is common in Niger, and the traditional attitude is that a man's status depends on the number of wives he has. Generally, the first wife divides the husband's possessions and resources among his other wives.

In Niger, men have legal rights over the household and completely control their wives and children. *Hausa* women have the right to inherit property from their family, but in reality women cannot hold assets separate from their husbands.

Niger's culture considers infertility a curse, so childless women face severe social stigma.

Women, even those divorced or widowed, are never considered to be heads of the household. According to Islamic law, divorced women can retain custody of male children until they reach puberty and can retain custody of girls until their puberty or marriage. However, *Hausa* customs allow children to stay with their mothers only until the age of seven.

Health

The poor healthcare system of Niger has had a negative impact on women. Only 30 percent of Nigerien women have access to antenatal care, and 17 percent of births take place in the absence of trained professionals.

Niger's maternal mortality rate is 590 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is 118 deaths per 1,000 live births. Both are among the highest in the world.

Women in Niger require the permission of their husbands for most healthcare matters, including reproductive health and family planning. Social impediments prevent the widespread use of contraceptives in Niger.

Interesting Social Customs

Among the *Tahoua*, *Illéla*, *Keita*, and *Madaoua*, a form of marriage called *wahaya* is popular. Under this system, a girl is separated from her family and sold in marriage to a man for procreation purposes.

A form of slavery still persists in some communities in Niger. While slavery among the *Songhay-Zarma* does not involve direct exploitation, the *Tuareg*, *Toubou*, and *Fulanis* subjugate their slaves to discrimination, violence, and anguish. A slave who leaves his master has to pay a *susey* (compensation).

Women in Business

General View

Niger's women, who constitute 47 percent of the workforce, primarily work in agriculture and the informal economy. A small but growing number of women are engaged in the civil service and professional sectors.

For those in rural areas, labor migration has forced many women to take on the double burden of all farm work in addition to their household activities. Career growth for urban women is also made difficult by pervasive gender discrimination that has relegated women to lower- and mid-level positions in the public and private sectors. Both rural and urban women are limited in their involvement in economic activities by the lack of childcare.

Women have benefited from the strategies of the government, which has focused on the advancement of women in the economy. Most female-oriented government efforts, however, usually falter due to severe financial problems.

Legal Rights

Niger's women received the right to vote in 1948. Niger's Constitution grants equal rights to women, but cultural traditions prevent the proper implementation of many legal provisions. Legally, women have the rights to own and inherit land and property, for instance, but traditional practices force them to transfer those rights to the male members of the family. Also, according to law, women are supposed to receive equal pay for equal work, but in reality, a large pay disparity exists between men and women. Strangely enough, this practice is one of the reasons why many factories favor employing women over men.

Women in Professions

The majority of Niger's women take part in agriculture and its related activities. Hausa women, who do not have freedom to go out of their houses without the accompaniment of male members, engage in food production and the manufacture of handicrafts, selling their products in the local market through their children.

Although there has been an increase in the number of women managers and administrators, Niger's women are still poorly represented in top decision-making roles. One exception to the rule is Amina Wangari, an accomplished businesswoman who serves as the President of the West

African Businesswomen Network. Her organization persuaded international organizations and governments to help West African women in business ventures through management training, information technology, and project financing.

Niger's laws forbid women from working in the evenings. There are no dress code restrictions that prevent women in Niger from taking up certain jobs.

Working mothers normally entrust older female siblings with the responsibility of childcare, since there is a serious lack of daycare facilities in Niger.

Women as Business Owners

The substantial role that Niger's women play in entrepreneurial activities has contributed much to the economy of the country. An increasing number of women in Niger are starting their own businesses. Women-owned businesses usually concentrate on the agricultural and services sector. Many of Niger's women are also engaged in the preparation and trading of snack foods, such as cowpea fritters.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Niger's male-dominated society expects passivity from women, so foreign women may encounter some difficulty in getting respect from local businessmen.

Niger's society attaches great importance to personal relationships, so it is highly recommended that foreign businesswomen spend some quality time with their local counterparts in order to establish a certain level of trust. It is quite normal to inquire about one's family and children during first meetings.

Visiting women should dress conservatively and discreetly. During a conversation, direct eye contact should be maintained as it signifies respect. Speaking tones should be moderate, as loud tones can signify anger. Men and women do not usually communicate openly in public.

Nigeria

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Nigeria's *macho* culture relegates women to subservient roles in the country's society. A woman's status depends entirely on her husband, and she has very few rights. Many women work, but they are generally restricted to low-profile jobs and rarely hold high-level positions.

Traditionally, Nigeria has always been a patriarchal society in which men subjugated women in all areas of life. Nigerian boys are given preference over girls, and families often deny girls an education in the belief that their education will go to waste when they marry. Studies by Amnesty International have indicated that up to 50 percent of all Nigerian women experience domestic violence. In certain communities, this figure is as high as 75 percent.

While Nigeria's social classes were traditionally divided by hereditary titles and lineage, money is now the indicator of a person's status in society. Women in the upper echelons of society have comparatively good access to quality education and other such social benefits. Women from the lower classes lead lives of poverty and repression.

Women's rights groups in Nigeria have tried to bring about change and have made strong attempts to protect the civil, political, and social rights of women all over the country. The situation is gradually improving, with Nigerian women now having established a strong presence in many of the country's job sectors.

In politics, just three ministers, three senators and twelve representatives of the 500 combined ministerial and National Assembly seats are women. In the judiciary, about 20 percent of all chief judges, the highest judicial post in a Nigerian state, are women. Female judges also hold 60 percent of the seats in the High Court of Lagos. Women are also actively involved in the country's medical sector. In business, women have restricted themselves to the informal sector, as it involves less capital and lower risk.

Urban women have greater access to education, health, and job opportunities when compared to rural women. Early teen marriages, which are invariably the fate of most rural girls, are less common among urban women.

In northern Nigeria, cultural and social practices such as female genital mutilation and polygamy are more pervasive. Relatively speaking, southern Nigerian women have made more progress toward equality.

There are no dress code restrictions for Nigerian women, although most of them choose to dress modestly.

Legal Rights

Nigeria's Constitution guarantees women equal rights in all areas of society, but prevailing traditional practices prevent women from realizing their rights. Nigerian women got the right to vote in 1978, and they also have the right to drive. Theoretically, Nigerian women have equal property and inheritance rights, but, in reality, they seldom inherit property from their husbands or parents.

The practices regarding abortion vary in the country. Northern Muslim Nigerians prohibit an abortion except when the pregnancy affects the life of the mother. In the more Christian south, abortions are allowed when birth would adversely affect the physical and mental health of the pregnant woman, if the fetus is dangerously deformed, or if the fetus has a congenital disease.

Nigerian women have the right to initiate divorce. In the event of a divorce, custody of children is usually awarded to the mother.

Education

Legally, Nigerian women have equal rights to education, but traditional practices and poor economic conditions usually conspire to limit this access. Only 42 percent of Nigeria's rural girls enroll in schools, compared to 72 percent of the urban girls. Girls often discontinue their studies after primary education due to early marriage or lack of finances. Nigeria's male literacy rate, at 74 percent, exceeds the women's rate of 59 percent.

Nigerian women do not have equal job opportunities and are often forced to get involved in the informal sector, where earnings are low.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Nigerian parents normally arrange marriages for their children. The country's Islamic laws forbid dating, and women have the chance to meet men only at social functions or religious ceremonies.

Although the legal marriageable age for a Nigerian woman is 18, most girls get married at the age of 16. In some parts of northern Nigeria, child marriages are common and girls get married when they reach the age of 12. Nigerian women take their husband's two family names after marriage.

Polygamy is legal and is widely practiced by many ethnic and religious groups, although its prevalence has been reduced by chronic poverty. In fact, studies show that about 14 percent of all households in Nigeria have female heads.

Nigeria's laws provide women with property rights, but traditional practices do not permit women to own, buy, or sell property. Even widows are deprived of the right to inherit their husband's property.

Childless women often feel excluded from Nigerian society as they are called *agon* (meaning "to hold in contempt" or "despise"). Infertility is usually grounds for a divorce.

Upon divorce, women get back a portion of the bride price or dowry payments made during the marriage. Generally, the courts make the final decision regarding custody of the children, based on the financial status of the parents.

Health

The National Health Policy of Nigeria guarantees equal healthcare services to all its citizens. However, the mediocre healthcare system, a lack of staff, and a lack of modern equipment have resulted in high maternal and

infant mortality rates. The maternal mortality rate is 800 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is 97 deaths per 1,000 live births. Studies indicate that only 35 percent of all births in Nigeria take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant.

In most parts of Nigeria, women cannot make healthcare decisions independently. In particular, Nigerian hospitals require the husband's permission for abortions and sterilization procedures.

Social taboos and the unavailability of birth control techniques have led to low contraceptive use. In recent years, however, Nigerians are increasingly accepting the use of contraceptives, since widespread poverty does not make it prudent for them to have many children.

Interesting Social Customs

The "cleansing ritual" after a man's death includes his widow having to shave her head, eat from dirty dishes, drink the water used for cleaning the deceased body, and have sexual relationships with her husband's family members. In the *Fulani* community, the brother of the deceased usually inherits his property and his wife.

Women in Business

General View

Some 36 percent of Nigerian women are employed but, while they are free to work in any job of their choice, the lack of basic education forces many to work as unskilled industrial laborers. The country's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also reported widespread discrimination against women in work places, even in educational settings.

Against these odds, women in urban areas are slowly making their presence felt in professional jobs despite stiff competition from men. Very few women, however, make it to the higher levels of management.

Legal Rights

Nigerian women were granted the right to vote in 1978. Nigeria's Constitution grants fewer legal rights to women than men. For instance, although women are legally eligible to own property, they can access it only through marriage. Also, according to traditional customs, widows cannot inherit their husband's property. Not surprisingly, Nigerian women do not receive the same salary as men for performing the same job.

Women in Professions

Rural women usually work in the agricultural sector, producing vegetables, cassava, and fruit. These women are also involved in weaving, dyeing, pottery making, and trading.

Seven percent of women are in managerial positions and less than two percent are working partners. Many women in Nigeria are members of distinguished institutions and run successful business establishments. Two such women are: Patricia Agbakwu-Ajegwu, the president of the Association of Food, Beverages and Tobacco Employers, vice-chairman of the Association of Plastics Manufacturers, vice-president of the Manufacturers Association, and vice-president of the Nigerian British Chamber of Commerce; and Uyi Oye-Onwuka,

the managing director of The Olive Home, which produces curtains, blinds, bedsheets, and table linen.

Women, except for nurses and those in managerial positions, are prohibited from working the night shifts at industrial and agricultural jobs. Women are also forbidden from doing underground work in mines. Although most Nigerian women prefer to dress conservatively, there are no dress code restrictions that prevent them from taking up certain jobs.

State-sponsored childcare is not available in Nigeria, so members of the extended family are normally entrusted with childcare when a mother is away at work. Some working mothers employ local nannies.

Women as Business Owners

The number of women working in the business sector is increasing every year. Some successful service firms owned by women supply services to foreign-owned establishments such as Cadbury, Andersen Consulting, Nestlé Foods, and the many multinational oil firms active in Nigeria.

Women-owned businesses usually focus on the food and beverage industry, hotels, agriculture, handicrafts, garments, and the service sector.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Nigerian businessmen have a long history of interacting with foreign business people. The first meeting with a Nigerian is usually very casual. Third parties often interject their opinions into business discussions without invitation, and it is advisable to take a neutral position in such situations. Business people visiting Nigeria should also be on their guard against commercial fraud and scams, which are increasingly becoming very common. Insist upon proper verification of any Nigerian enterprise before a business relationship is initiated or money changes hands.

Westernization is very profound in Nigeria, especially among the youth, but it is still a country rich in traditional customs. Nigeria's culture strongly disapproves of kissing and assuming sexually suggestive postures in public. Extreme displays of emotions such as happiness or sadness are very common.

Traditionally, village elders were given gifts as a sign of respect, and this culture of gift giving has seeped into business circles, where all officials that one deals with expect gifts every time a visit is made.

North Korea

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

North Korean women live a life of deprivation under a repressive Stalinist regime. They are, however, no worse off than the men of North Korea: the country's Communist ideological underpinnings ensure them full equality with men, and the DPRK regime has made good on the promise of full and equal participation in society. The government's social policies have rendered the terms "gender-bias" and "gender-discrimination" largely irrelevant but have put a lot of pressure on women to work hard, study hard, and bear children.

Traditional North Korea was a typically patriarchal society in which men were considered superior and women played a subordinate role. In the course of the political, economic, and social reforms set in motion by the Communist regime, there has been a gradual lessening and even complete eradication of the social impediments that Korean women historically faced. There exist, however, vestiges of male-dominated attitudes in society. Women are still considered as the "inner householder" while men are termed the "outer householder," and they still gravitate towards such jobs as receptionists, switchboard operators, typists, and clerks.

The ideological commitment of the DPRK government demands women's full equal involvement in economic activity to such an extent that they are expected to work eight hours, study eight hours, and rest eight hours, according to some South Korean sources. Women with children have to work only six hours for eight hours pay. Women are still expected to do all the household chores.

In the DPRK everything is owned by the state so there is hardly any private property. There are, therefore, no "class" distinctions among women across the country, apart for the women belonging to the relatively privileged ruling elite.

The government of North Korea has adopted several policies and legal provisions to ensure gender equality. These include equal job opportunity and wages, pre- and post-maternity leave, breast-feeding time, a prohibition on heavy work and overtime duty for pregnant women, and day care facilities. The state also provides a wide range of child- and woman-based family benefits designed to increase the participation of women in the country's economy, such as subsidization of 50 percent of children's goods and school things and a free house for the mothers of more than four children.

Although the DPRK government encourages women in politics, North Korean women occupy only 20 percent of seats in the lower house. North Korean women constitute almost 10 percent of the judges at all levels of courts. The number of female medical students has increased in recent years. North Korean women play a significant role in the education, health, and commerce sectors. Rural women in North Korea enjoy equal rights with urban women, although they have less access to technical and cultural resources.

Generally, North Korean women wear blouses with skirts or pants for work and their traditional *hanbok* (a bright-colored, loose-fitting dress) for traditional social functions.

Legal Rights

The North Korean Constitution grants women equal rights with men under family law, property law, and in the judiciary.

North Korean women have equal rights to vote and stand for office. They also have the right to drive vehicles. Under law, women can inherit property or land equally from their parents. It is worth noting that the State owns all property and there is very little property that can be inherited.

North Korean women have free access to abortions.

Women have equal rights to initiate divorce proceedings. The custody of children is determined by mutual agreement or by the court in the best interests of the children. A mother usually receives the custody of children below three years of age. The non-custodial parent has to pay 10-30 percent of his or her earnings for the maintenance of children until they reach working age.

Education

North Korean women have unrestricted access to education. The law has made 11 years of primary and secondary education mandatory for all children of both sexes. According to the estimates, North Korea has the same high literacy rate for both sexes: 99 percent. The number of girls enrolling in primary and secondary schools is relatively similar and many girls pursue their studies in universities.

Educated women have equal access to job opportunities as men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, parents arranged North Korean marriages. These days, girls have the freedom to choose their life partners. Women meet men at the work place, social gatherings, or family get-togethers.

The minimum age of marriage for women in North Korea is 25. North Korean women do not take the name of their husbands on marriage but rather maintain their father's family name.

North Korean women can hold assets (whatever little is allowed under the Communist system) separately from their husbands.

A man as the head of the family is responsible for his family's economic needs while a woman is supposed to take care of all domestic chores and child rearing. Many married women in North Korea will quit their jobs to serve the family.

Traditionally, infertile women were called *suknyu* (woman made of stone) and, although government encourages women to have multiple children, today's egalitarian North Korea discourages the ostracizing of childless women. In the matter of children, sons are still preferred over daughters, indicating that certain discriminatory attitudes are not yet extinct.

Upon divorce, mothers usually receive the custody of children less than three years of age. In other case it is decided by the courts or by mutual agreement.

Health

North Korean women have equal access to the health care system and can avail themselves of free medical treatment. North Korea's health care system for women includes the Pyongyang maternity hospital, maternal facilities in town and rural areas, gynecological and obstetric divisions in the hospitals at all levels, and the household doctor system. The state offers excellent antenatal care and assistance at childbirth. DPRK has a comparatively low infant mortality rate of 23.29 deaths per 1,000 live births. Mothers who have more than one baby at a birth enjoy special benefits offered by the government.

North Korean women have the right to make their own health care decisions, but they usually discuss the spacing of children and family planning with their husbands. Contraceptives are easily available and usage is high.

Interesting Social Customs

Married couples are given a wooden goose, as it signifies harmony and commitment throughout the marriage.

Women in Business

General View

North Korean women are generally given a great degree of freedom in choosing whether to be a housewife or to take up a job, but most women work outside the home and shoulder their family and household responsibilities as well. This is due, in great part, to the country's economic crisis, which has required more women to join the workforce. Most women are engaged in a wide variety of economic activities, particularly in lower- or mid-level occupations.

Legal Rights

The North Korean Constitution assures women of equal rights with the men in all areas. Women received the right to vote in 1946. They also have the rights to own and inherit businesses or property.

Despite legal provisions to the contrary, women earn 63 percent of men's salaries for performing the same job due to widespread gender discrimination at the workplace.

Women in Professions

Gender-based divisions of labor have confined North Korean women to jobs in healthcare, light industry, and the service sector (receptionists, switchboard operators, typists, secretaries). They also contribute to the agricultural sector through subsistence farming. The government has instituted rice-cooking houses, food-processing factories, morning and evening shops, and other public welfare facilities to increase the number of women in the workforce.

Although women have a high representation in the labor force, gender discrimination prevents women from holding top-ranking positions in the government and private sectors. One example of a well-known North Korean businesswoman is Kim Yeon-ok, who has been actively seeking foreign trade partners for North Korea.

North Korean women are not legally barred from taking up any profession, although laws protect women from having to work in hazardous jobs.

The government provides childcare facilities through several nurseries, daycare centers, and kindergartens. Working women in North Korea usually seek the help of elderly relatives or state nurseries to help with childcare.

Women as Business Owners

There are few women-owned businesses in North Korea, since the government controls all the major companies and businesses except for a select number of private firms. Most women-owned businesses are small-sized ones, generally focusing on retail trading and the service industry. Rural women run private canteens, food stalls, and fruit shops, while urban women own bigger shops and restaurants.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

North Koreans usually treat foreign businesswomen with deference. A handshake or a bow is the norm of greeting in North Korea. As Koreans give importance to hierarchy, it is best to exchange business cards.

North Korean business culture is formal. Visiting women should make appointments in advance and dress formally in suits for meetings. Koreans generally have poor conversational skills in English, so the services of an interpreter will be essential.

Building a good rapport is very important, since North Koreans prefer to do business with people they know well. North Koreans are renowned for their negotiation skills. Negotiations will take a long time, as they are meticulous about details. Foreign businesswomen should remain patient, calm, and firm.

Sitting in a relaxed manner or showing the soles of the feet is considered rude.

Norway

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Norway has a strong cultural ethos of gender equality and has long been committed to women's development in society, politics, and the economy. Traditionally, Norwegian women were homemakers, but economic necessity in the 1960s drove women to join the workforce in large numbers. Women were initially concentrated in the lower-paying positions, such as nurses or secretaries, and were poorly represented in the upper levels of management and industry. Today, Norwegian women constitute nearly half the labor force (55 percent full-time, 45 percent part-time) and have the best women's employment statistics in Europe.

In 1979, Norway enacted The Equal Status Act to prevent discrimination against women in employment opportunities and wages. Later on, the scope of the Act was widened to promote the equality of the sexes in all areas of life. A recent amendment to the Act guarantees at least 40 percent women on public councils and private boards. It also provides for equal representation in male-dominated professions in economics, agriculture, communications, technology, and defense, as well as in female-dominated areas such as health and the social sector.

Many Norwegian women still shoulder the dual responsibilities of a household and a career. Women in the urban middle class share domestic responsibilities with their husbands, while women in the urban working class bear most of the burden themselves.

Norway reaffirmed its position as a country committed to gender equality when it became the first country in the world to establish the Ombudsman for Equal Status of Women and Men. Women are well represented in politics (over 41 percent of elected national representatives; one of the highest ratios in the world) and in law (where 25 percent of lawyers and the majority of law students are women), and they constitute a quarter of the self-employed in Norway.

Norwegian women have no particular dress code restrictions.

Legal Rights

The Constitution grants equal rights to men and women and prohibits any kind of discrimination. Norwegian women won the right to vote in 1913, and they have other general rights: to run for office, to incorporate a business, to own and inherit property, and to seek separation or divorce. Upon marriage, all assets become joint property unless specified by a pre-nuptial contract, and children of both sexes inherit equally from the parents.

The Gender Equality Act adopted in 2002 obliges public and private enterprises to promote gender equality among their employees and to report annually on their progress. Norway legalized abortion in 1978.

Education

The early 1980s witnessed a surge in women's education and led to enormous growth at both middle and higher education levels. Today, women make up 55 percent of the total enrollment at universities and colleges and, although fewer women opt for natural science, mathematics, and information technology courses, efforts are underway to increase the proportion of women in science and technology.

The system of coeducation is followed in schools and colleges, and women and men have the same literacy rate of 99 percent.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

The liberated women of Norway have the full freedom to choose their partners, male or female, inside marriage or outside of it. According to some sources, the institution of marriage is slowly becoming extinct. About 60 percent of Norwegian children are born to unmarried mothers. Norwegian women can also legally have a lesbian marriage.

Norwegian women typically start dating and having sex from their early teens. Girls usually meet their dating partners at schools, playgrounds, dances, and social functions. Young people also often use online services to find dates.

The legal age of consent for marriage is 18 for women. The average age at marriage is 26.3 years for women and 29.8 years for men. Women can decide whether or not to take their husband's name after marriage. They have full rights to hold assets separately from their husbands.

Polygamy is illegal in Norway, although some Norwegian Islamic clerics have recommended the practice as beneficial whenever circumstances are conducive.

Childlessness is more of an individual issue than a social issue and carries no stigma. The divorce rate has increased considerably in the last decade, resulting in an increase in single-parent households. The court reserves the right to grant child custody based on the suitability rather than the gender of the parent.

Health

Norwegian women have equal access to the state's excellent health care services, which are provided free of cost. They have the right to make all decisions regarding their health and have a higher life expectancy than men.

Women have the right to abortion and good access to contraception. Norway has the low infant mortality rate of 4 deaths for every 1,000 live births.

Interesting Social Customs

It is customary for Norwegian brides to dance a lot at their wedding receptions because people believe that the tinkle of the bride's bangles will stave off the evil spirits that try to possess her. Also, bridesmaids must wear dresses that are similar, but not identical, to the bride's in order to confuse evil spirits. Furthermore, two small fir trees are planted on either side of the door to the couple's new home as a symbol of fertility.

Women in Business

General View

Norway has one of the highest proportions of working women in the world, with about 69 percent of women employed compared to 74 percent of men. Favorable laws, the presence of a gender equality ombudsman, high educational standards among women, and the liberated attitudes of Norwegian women are credited with women's success in business and the professions. Government regulations stipulate that all public committees and boards must have at least 40 percent representation of women.

Norway has some of the best gender-equality practices in the world and ranks second behind Canada on the gender-related development index. For instance, all advertisements for jobs are gender-neutral, except those relating to models or actors, and offices that have a high concentration of men or women must show that they are trying to balance the workforce by employing more people of the other gender. Another telling indicator of the country's commitment to gender equality is that the economic fluctuations of the 1980s and 1990s affected men greatly but had little effect on the level of employment for women.

Legal Rights

Women enjoy all legal rights on a par with men. They were granted the full right to vote in 1913 and had been allowed to vote on special issues for decades before then. Women also have equal rights for inheriting, owning, and managing property. Both partners in a marriage have equal rights over the property and get to share it evenly in case of divorce.

despite gender equality in the workplace being guaranteed by law, there is a difference of about 10 to 15 percent between the salaries of women and men. Wage growth is also reported to be slower for women than it is for men.

Women in Professions

Norwegian women still prefer some traditional industries over others, in spite of the equality in opportunities. The majority of women are employed in sectors like hotels and restaurants, wholesale and retail trade, finance, public administration, defense, education, healthcare, social work, and community, personal, and social services. Their representation in other sectors like mining, power and water supply, construction, transport, communication, and real estate is only between 8 and 30 percent.

Women in senior positions are also relatively rare. There are only about 21 women at the director level out of a total of 488 directors, and about 10 percent of the major companies do not have any women executives on their boards. Women's representation at the top level in the central government is also less than men's, despite the fact that 45 percent of the government workforce is made up of women.

The number of women in top positions in the private sector has increased, however. The percentage of females in senior official and managerial positions was 65 and 35 in the private and public sectors, respectively, in 2002. Women tend to head small and medium-scale enterprises rather than large businesses, with a higher proportion in the health, education, and social sectors.

A couple of the prominent women leaders in Norway are Kristin Clement, president of the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry, and Ase Aulie Michelet, executive vice president of Nycomed Amersham Imaging.

There are no dress code restrictions for Norwegian women. Professional women are expected to dress smartly, yet casually. Trousers, skirts, sweaters, blazers, suits and dresses are common at the workplace.

Women as Business Owners

The number of women who own and run businesses has increased over the last two decades, to approximately 20 to 30 percent. In 1990, the percentage of self-employed women was 24 percent. There are more self-employed women in the public, social, and private sectors like health, hospitality, and education. Norwegian women typically own businesses in retailing, hotels and restaurants, and other service sectors.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen visiting Norway will be accepted and respected. Men do not stand up when a woman enters a room, nor do they introduce women first; foreigners should not interpret this as rudeness. Business dinners (generally between 5 and 6p.m.) and lunches are generally formal and include some rituals, such as *Skaal* toasting.

Oman

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Higher educational standards, better employment opportunities, greater participation in politics, and changing social and legal norms have enabled Omani women to make a great deal of progress over the last few years. Today, women work at all levels of both the public and private sectors, girls are performing better than boys in schools and colleges, there are more female students than male students at the university level, and Oman can boast of having the first female minister among the Arab GCC countries (elected in 2004).

The culture of Oman remains patriarchal and male-dominated to a great extent, so women's choices about education, career, travel, marriage, and property are still decided by male family members. Although legislation has been introduced to give women more independence, the laws remain discriminatory.

About 20 percent of women were economically active in 2004, but the government's policy of "Omanization," which aims to replace expatriates in the workplace with Omani citizens, has given more opportunities for women to become economically active.

The economic participation of women still depends on their social and economic status. Many women prefer to take up only specific "feminine" jobs like teaching or public sector employment. Women represent a third of all civil servants in the country, including eight members in the State Council. Omani women represent around 13 percent of the total seats in the senior management categories of the government (3 female deputy ministers, 2 consultative council members, 4 senior advisors, 13 Special Grade officers, and 261 Grade One officers of Director or Director-General ranks). There is also one female overseas ambassador.

In the field of law, women hold the rank of attorney general, but they cannot become judges in the country's courts. Women are active as doctors, teachers, and bankers. Entrepreneurship among women is encouraged to a great extent.

Rural women, especially those in the desert interiors, are economically active in activities like livestock breeding. Customary laws hold more sway in rural areas, lowering the status of women to a considerable extent. The role and perception of women is not very different among the majority Omanis and the minority Zanzibaris.

Omani women still wear the *abayaa*, a long black cloak that covers the entire body with or without a veil.

Legal Rights

Article 17 of the Basic Law of Oman gives equality to all citizens in rights and duties irrespective of origin, gender, religion, color, language, domicile, sect, or social status. However, customary laws like the Islamic *Shari'a* personal status codes discriminate against women in terms of property, inheritance, marriage, divorce, and the custody of children.

Women received the right to vote without restrictions for the first time in 2003. Omani women have the right to drive and to own and manage businesses and property independently. However, they cannot inherit property on a par with men. Abortion is illegal except to save the life of the woman.

A new law introduced in 1997 gives women the right to initiate divorces, albeit under limited conditions. Divorce is granted only if the husband is missing for a year or more, if he is jailed for three years or more, or if he fails to support the wife financially. The same law also grants women the right to refuse to share her home with another of her husband's wives. Many women, especially illiterates and those in rural areas, are ignorant of their legal rights.

Education

The female literacy rate is 74 percent, versus 87 percent for men. The enrollment of girls in primary schools increased from 64 percent in 2000 to 79 percent in 2004, and nearly 98 percent of these girls graduated to the fifth grade. Omani classrooms are now co-educational.

Women have equal opportunities to pursue education, but they have not been allowed to enroll in agriculture and engineering courses since 1993. The proportion of women in universities is almost equal to that of men and there has also been a rise in the number of women studying abroad.

Although women are entitled to higher education, their family members decide their employment. Consequently, most of them end up doing only "feminine" jobs like teaching or working in government jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages are the norm in Oman, although women have the right to marry a person of their choice. Marriages with cousins are still preferred among most families, although the law forbids marriage between close relatives. Casual dating is not acceptable, and many people don't date until they are formally engaged. A recent law has stipulated the minimum marriageable age as 18 years old.

Omani women can retain their own maiden names even after marriage. They can also own and manage assets and property independent of their husbands.

Polygamy is legal and common. Men can take up to four wives. Usually, the first wife is much older than the other wives, and also closer to the husband in relation, like a first cousin. These days, men are increasingly divorcing their previous wives before remarrying.

Families are patrilocal, with about three generations of people gathered in a single house. The oldest woman allots household tasks to the rest of the family members. Even nuclear families keep in constant touch with their extended family members. Childlessness is frowned upon, and families with more children are considered more "stable."

Women can initiate divorce proceedings on certain grounds and are also eligible to have custody of children.

The children may be consulted about which parent they want to live with after the divorce. Women who do not have custody are granted visitation rights.

Health

Women are entitled to free healthcare services in state hospitals. Almost the entire urban population and over 90 percent of rural people have access to healthcare. Trained personnel were present for over 98 percent of deliveries, and this has helped bring the infant mortality rate down from 126 in 1970 to 10 per 1,000 live births in 2003.

Women can make their own healthcare decisions, even those relating to reproductive health. Contraceptives are used by about 24 percent of women.

Women in Business

General View

The government of Oman encourages women to participate in the country's economic development by providing them with the freedom to pursue a career or to run their own businesses. Although there are still a few social constraints, women are active in every kind of job in Oman, from security guards to members of the Council of Ministers. There are many women in the higher levels of government and business.

More women are pursuing higher education than ever before and are surpassing men in terms of merit qualifications. Because of their relative wealth, however, many Omani women pursue education and employment more as a matter of choice than necessity and drop out of the workforce when they have families. This has resulted in a low overall level of employment, at just 20 percent, for working Omani women, but this is still among the highest levels of participation in the Gulf States.

Legal Rights

Omani women have the right to pursue any career under Article 12 of the Basic Law. The Basic Law also guarantees protection against gender discrimination, the right to own property, and equal pay for equal work. Women over the age of 21 earned the right to vote in 2000. They can also obtain driving licenses.

Women are still discriminated against, however, in terms of inheritance. They can pursue legal action to get their inheritances, but many women refrain from doing so. Omani women also often face inequity at work in terms of recruitment, promotions, training, and job benefits like insurance, since there are no strict laws to address these issues. There is also no law against sexual harassment in the workplace. On the positive side, Oman's Labor Law does address many issues such as working conditions, maternity leaves, widowhood leave entitlements, and special leaves of absence for women to accompany their spouses abroad.

Women in Professions

Oman has women working as doctors, lawyers, bankers, teachers, managers, journalists, and businesswomen. Women are, however, not allowed to be judges in the country's courts. In rural areas, women are actively engaged in farming, fishing, and related activities like the mending of fishing nets.

The government is the biggest employer of women by far, employing nearly three times as many women as does the private sector. Many women hold positions in higher levels in the government, including the state council, which has eight women. There are also three female deputy ministers, two consultative council members, four senior advisors, thirteen special grade officers, and hundreds of Grade One officers. In total they constitute about 13 percent of the senior administrative positions in the government.

A few well-known Omani businesswomen are Assilah al-Harthy, managing director of the Al-Harthy Group; Hind Suhail Bahwan, chairperson of the Bahwan Cybertek Group; Fausia Al Araiimi, managing director of Sur Plastics; Maryam Bader Al Suqry, fashion specialist; Ruquaya Al Busaidi, managing director of Dhaleema Trading; and Areej Darwish, another prominent businesswoman.

Working women in Oman generally dress conservatively in long dresses, or skirts or trousers with long-sleeved shirts. Headscarves are not required, but are often worn as a colorful fashion accessory.

Working women have a host of childcare options. They either use the help of extended family members or employ nannies or housemaids. Childcare centers, nurseries, kindergartens, and daycare centers are also available, although they are typically either very expensive or not properly regulated.

Women as Business Owners

In 1995, 13 percent of working women were self-employed. Women own and manage just around 3 percent of all registered businesses. Small and medium-sized enterprises run by women usually employ just one or two workers and have minimal working capital. Over 70 percent of women-owned businesses are in the service sector, mostly in education and childcare. Many women also manage family businesses.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although there are many foreign women at all levels in the workplace, foreign businesswomen may face some initial resistance. Omanis are very formal and polite in speech and manners. The business atmosphere is relaxed, and people sometimes conduct business with several parties at the same time. Meetings often involve considerable small talk in the beginning.

Presentations should be brief yet informative and the visitor should initiate the business discussion. Bilingual business cards are advisable.

Foreign businesswomen should dress conservatively, but without a headscarf. Avoid summers and the Ramadan season when scheduling business meetings.

Pakistan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women in Pakistani society have traditionally been regarded as having a place only within the four walls of their home. While men are tasked with being the breadwinners, women are expected to cook, clean, and take care of the family. These expectations are still a fact of life for rural Pakistani women, whose chances of having any meaningful level of participation in Pakistani society are severely limited.

Pakistan is a patriarchal Islamic society where men dominate in all areas of public and private life. Pakistani women and girls are particularly prone to acts of violence from men. Such acts can include beatings, mutilation, having acid thrown on their faces, murder, custodial beatings, rape, and the practice of "honor killings," where a woman who deviates from established social and cultural norms is killed, ostensibly to protect the family's honor.

The position of Pakistani women depends on social and economic class. Women at the upper levels lead privileged lives with more personal freedom, servants to perform chores, and all modern luxuries at their fingertips. Middle-class women usually work and have careers, although their dependence on their husbands is no less than that of upper-class women.

The role of Pakistani women in society is undergoing change, with women playing an increasingly larger role. More women are working, some in traditionally male-dominated fields. Pakistani women have also been able to form support groups and associations to advocate issues and press for greater rights.

In politics, women currently occupy 21 percent of the seats in the National Assembly and 18 percent of seats in the Senate. Pakistan has had one woman prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, and other women have found a place in various high-level positions in the central and provincial governments.

Women also have a place in the lower judiciary, although in lower numbers than male judges. Women were recently appointed as High Court judges. In the medical sector, women form almost the entire nursing workforce and a significant number of women work as doctors and dentists. A sizeable number of Pakistani women are involved in running businesses, mostly ranging from micro- to medium-sized enterprises.

Rural Pakistani women not only suffer from a lack of access to various opportunities, they are also limited by traditional social and cultural customs that expect them to stay at home and care for their family. Urban women have vastly better access to education and employment opportunities, and they are not bound by many of the constraints faced by rural women.

Pakistani women dress conservatively in North Indian-style clothing. Women from more traditional families wear the *burqa*, a covering that reveals only their face or eyes.

Legal Rights

Pakistani women enjoy the same legal rights as men. They were granted the right to vote in 1947. Women also have the right to drive cars and own as well as inherit property.

Abortions are illegal in Pakistan, with exceptions only granted to save the mother's life or to prevent serious damage to her physical or mental health.

Pakistani women have the right to initiate a divorce, but for the majority Muslims, Islamic *Shari'a* laws, which are highly discriminatory to women, apply. In the event of a divorce, women have the right to claim custody of the children.

Education

Women have equal access to all educational facilities in Pakistan. Although rural women have limited access, they face no discrimination when they choose to enroll at educational institutions located in urban areas.

Current female literacy rates stand at only 36 percent (mainly due to rural illiteracy), which compares unfavorably to the male rate of 64 percent. Most Pakistani girls manage only to complete their primary education. The enrollment rates for girls keep dropping at higher levels in the educational system.

There are some co-educational schools, colleges, and universities in Pakistan, but generally boys and girls study in single-sex schools after the primary level.

Educated women have the same access to employment as men. Greater numbers of women contribute financial support to their families by working outside the home.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, most marriages in Pakistan were arranged, with very few women or men allowed to choose their own spouses. Times have changed, and although arranged marriages are still the norm, an increasing number of urban youth prefer to select their own spouses. In the rural areas, however, a woman could be killed for choosing her own spouse in defiance of her family's wishes.

Dating is not practiced like it is in the West. Although young people do meet, they do not socialize too openly. However, the existence of Pakistani online dating agencies is proof of changing times.

The mean marrying age for Pakistani women is 21, although the marrying age tends to be considerably lower in rural areas, with some girls still married off in childhood. Although Pakistani women are not legally required to take their husband's names, most do so to avoid problems in situations that may require proof of marriage.

Polygamy is practiced in Pakistan. According to Pakistani law, a man who wishes to practice polygamy must first get the written permission of the first wife before he can marry a second wife.

Men are generally the head of the households, but Pakistani women have the right to hold assets separate from their husbands. Many rural women in Pakistan also head households, mostly because the men have migrated to urban centers in search of work.

It is considered bad in Pakistani society if a woman is childless. In keeping with Islamic beliefs, children are looked upon as great blessings, and Pakistani women generally have high birth rates.

In the event of a divorce, the wife has the right to property that she owned before marriage and has other rights, such as alimony. Custody of the children may be granted to either spouse, with the court usually basing the final decision on the best interests of the children. Factors that can influence the granting of child custody include the age and health of the child, the religion of the mother, her employment status, and whether she plans to remarry.

Health

Women have equal access to healthcare facilities in Pakistan. In certain cases, access is limited by the absence of female doctors.

Maternal mortality rates for Pakistan are high, at 350 deaths per 100,000 live births. According to 2006 estimates, the infant mortality rate is 70 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Pakistani women are expected to obtain their husband's permission before making any healthcare decision. Contraceptive prevalence, although low, is increasing, with the government launching various programs to spread awareness and increase the use of birth control methods.

Interesting Social Customs

One custom that has an enormous negative impact on Pakistani women is the practice of honor killings. These involve a woman being murdered by a male relative in an attempt to protect the family's honor. This is usually because the woman is suspected of having an extra-marital relationship or, if unmarried, of being in love with a boy of whom the girl's parents and relatives disapprove. Hundreds of such killings take place in Pakistan every year.

Women in Business

General View

Traditional attitudes prevalent in Pakistani society dictate that a woman should remain within the four walls of her house, but times are changing. Many urban women are actively employed, and a large percentage of rural women participate in the agricultural sector. The number of Pakistani women entrepreneurs is also showing signs of steady growth.

The increase in educational levels and awareness among Pakistani women has seen them taking on an increasingly visible role in society. They can now be found participating in almost all sectors of the economy.

Legal Rights

Pakistan provides its women with the same legal rights as men, including the right to own businesses and to own and inherit property. Pakistan granted its women the right to vote in 1947. The application of Sharia laws, especially in certain provinces, has impinged on enforcement of civil laws, however.

Pakistani women are also subject to pay discrimination, with studies indicating that they earn less than 78 percent of what men earn for performing the same job.

Women in Professions

In the rural areas of Pakistan, the traditional jobs for women were limited to the agricultural sector, with about 80 percent of all rural women working on farms. In urban areas, women compose a large part of the teaching and medical workforce and also work in the service and manufacturing sectors.

While there are increasing numbers of female entrepreneurs in Pakistan, there are not many women who rise to become the heads of companies. The government, however, has taken steps to bring about a change in the current scenario.

Some of the more famous female businesspeople in Pakistan include Shameim Kazmi, the managing director of Marketing and Research Consultants and the president of the Association of Business, Professional and Agricultural Women; Ambreen Bukhari, the owner of Menika Mines, a company that exports precious stones and prepares studded jewelry for the domestic market; Ayesha Zeenat, who owns Pappasalis, an Italian restaurant; and Firdous Huda, the owner of Firdousi Beauty Parlor.

The outlook for businesswomen in Pakistan is very positive, with more women willing to join the business sector than at any time in the past and younger female entrepreneurs undeterred by the fact that certain sectors are traditionally male-dominated.

Pakistani women can join any professions except those that are hazardous in nature, like certain jobs at mines and factories and combat roles in the armed forces.

Pakistani women dress conservatively in North Indian style *salwar kameez* pantsuits, all the more so in the workplace. However, there are no dress code restrictions that prevent them from taking up certain jobs.

In extended families, working mothers usually entrust childcare to the grandparents or other relatives. Working mothers in nuclear families usually make use of day-care centers or other childcare facilities. State-sponsored childcare is available in Pakistan, with the government involved in setting up day-care centers and crèches.

Women as Business Owners

An increasing number of Pakistani women are involved in owning and operating their own businesses. A majority of businesses owned by women are micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises.

Women-owned businesses typically focus on the textile, educational, health, beauty care, manufacturing, food, and service sectors. Many women have also started businesses in traditionally male-dominated sectors like transport, filmmaking, consultancy, and publishing.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are unlikely to face any problems in conducting business in Pakistan.

Pakistani business is based more on trust and the formation of a relationship than on pure business credentials. Styles of conversation are mostly indirect, with Pakistanis using roundabout and, as far as possible, noncontroversial statements.

It is advisable not to use one's left hand for any purpose, since it is generally considered unclean. Learning general rules about Islamic culture as well as a few words in the native language can go a long way in averting basic errors of

etiquette. The Pakistani government is heavily bureaucratic, with most decisions requiring the approval of several layers of officials. Avoid scheduling meetings during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Clothing should be modest and conservative. Revealing or tight clothes are considered inappropriate, especially in rural areas.

Panama

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In Panama, women occupy a status that is clearly secondary to men. Panamanian society is highly male-dominated: the man is the head of the family, while the woman's role is to care for her family and children.

In a Panamanian family, boys are given more freedom than girls. Girls always live under the strict supervision of their parents. Domestic violence and abuse against women is deeply ingrained in the country's culture, which expects men to be aggressive and sexually active while women are submissive and docile.

The position of women in Panamanian society is slowly changing, however, because of the efforts of the government and various women's organizations. The government has adopted a series of laws and welfare schemes to improve the status of women. These welfare measures have helped women to get better education, job opportunities, and health services.

Panama has its first female president in Mireya Moscoso. In 2005, about 17 percent of the total seats in the Parliament were held by women. In the judiciary, one of the judges in the Supreme Court is a woman. In the business sector, women own less than ten percent of all businesses in Panama. Women make up a large portion of Panama's nurses and nurse's aides.

The position of a woman in Panama is dependent upon her social and economic class. Poor women in Panama are illiterate, unemployed, and have many children, as they are ignorant of family planning methods. The level of poverty is greater in the rural areas, where women have lesser access to education, jobs, and health facilities.

Panama is home to various ethnic minorities such as the indigenous *Kuna* and *Guaymi* tribes. In these communities, women enjoy equality with men and are treated with respect. The *Kuna* Indians have a matriarchal society, and women play a major role in running the family.

Panamanian women do not face any particular dress code restrictions.

Legal Rights

According to the Panamanian Constitution, all people are equal before the law irrespective of their gender. Panamanian women received the right to vote in the year 1941. Women also have the right to own as well as inherit property.

Abortions can be performed only to save the life or the mental and physical health of the pregnant woman. Only a physician in an authorized government healthcare center is allowed to carry out the procedure.

Panama's laws allow women to initiate divorce. In case of a divorce, mothers have the right to claim custody of the children. The courts usually grant such requests, especially if the children are very young.

Education

The Panamanian government guarantees equal educational rights for women. This has led to high educational levels in women in the last three decades. The female literacy rate in Panama is 92 percent compared to 93 percent for men.

About 99 percent of all girls attend primary school, and most women in Panama complete high school. Schooling is co-educational, with boys and girls sharing the same classroom space.

Women, even the educated ones, have difficulty in getting good jobs. Even when women have better educational levels than men in similar positions, they earn lower salaries.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages are common among the various ethnic groups in Panama. The selection of the spouse is handled by parents or relatives and depends on issues such as land and wealth, resolution of long standing disputes, and acquiring an ally. Urban women, however, commonly choose their own spouses.

In the urban areas, dating is common. Young people meet each other through dating agencies, dating websites, social gatherings, religious events, and at educational institutions. Dating practices normally begin during the teenage years. In indigenous Panamanian culture, dating is not permitted.

Rural girls usually marry very young. However, the average marrying age of women in Panama is 22 years. Women have the freedom to either retain their family name or take their husband's name after marriage. In the event of a divorce, women usually revert back to their maiden names. The Family Code permits joint or common property in a marriage.

Women head about 27 percent of households in Panama. Of these, 71 percent of the rural households and 48 percent of the urban households live in poverty.

Panamanian culture accords greater respect to a woman with children than to a childless woman.

In a divorce, women can claim a share of the marital property. If children are involved, the court decides on the custody of children. However, mothers are usually awarded custody of the children.

Health

In Panama, women have equal access to basic healthcare services. There has been a general improvement in the health of women due to greater availability of health services.

Statistics indicate that 93 percent of all births in Panama take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. Panama's current maternal mortality rate is 70 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is 17 deaths per 1,000 births.

Panamanian women are permitted to make their own healthcare decisions, though this freedom is heavily dependent on the social and economic class of the woman. Among various tribal communities, spousal consent is necessary for healthcare decisions.

The government has initiated many birth control measures in Panama. Contraceptive use in the country is currently at 58 percent.

Women in Business

General View

The status of Panamanian women is undergoing steady change, with levels of employment increasing and women occupying top levels in public service and education. The government has also initiated laws seeking to empower women and has passed legislation making violence against women a criminal offence.

There is still much to be done, however. Panamanian women do not have social security, and the unemployment rate of women is not only high, at 17.9 percent, but it's also 8 percent greater than the rate for unemployed men.

Legal Rights

Panama's Constitution provides women with the same legal rights as men. This includes the right to vote (since 1941), to own businesses, and to inherit property. Legally, women are entitled to the same salary as men for performing the same jobs, but statistics indicate that women earn 87 percent of the salaries paid to men in similar positions.

Women in Professions

Popular areas of female employment include the sciences, engineering, nursing, dressmaking, education, textiles, and food production. An increasing number of women also now work in nontraditional areas such as transportation, electric power, construction, and mining.

A few women head large companies, and many women head small or micro-sized enterprises. Some famous female Panamanian leaders are Mireya Moscoso, the President of Panama, and Rosabel Vergara, the Vice-Minister for Youth, Women, Children and Family.

Women are not prohibited from any jobs other than those that require heavy labor in industries or involve night shifts. Panamanian women are not bound by dress codes. They usually wear Western-style business suits to meetings.

Working mothers usually rely on grandparents or older siblings to take care of young children. Some women make use of public and private daycare centers. The

Panamanian Government had opened community nursery schools and other support systems for the purpose of childcare, but the number of these centers has decreased considerably of late.

Women as Business Owners

An increasing number of Panamanian women are starting and running their own businesses. They own almost 50 percent of all businesses in certain service industries. Panamanian women also run small-scale businesses in aquaculture, agriculture, dressmaking, handicrafts, and training institutes.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Panamanians are generally formal, courteous, and polite to foreign businesswomen. Women heading business meetings are given full control of the proceedings.

Address people by their formal titles and express your wishes and opinions clearly so that they are not misinterpreted. Women can go unaccompanied on the streets and dine alone at restaurants without any fear, although whistles and other unwanted attention from men are common.

Women are advised to dress conservatively in a dress, a skirt with a blouse, or a lightweight suit. It is advisable to wear natural fabrics such as linen and cotton to avoid discomfort in Panama's tropical climate. Casual dresses are suitable for sightseeing, but revealing clothes like shorts and tank tops should be worn only on the beach.

Papua New Guinea

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women in Papua New Guinea lack equal opportunities because of traditional customs and attitudes. They face inequality in education and employment, and they assume much of the country's domestic and agriculture workload.

Papua New Guinea's traditional society looks down on men who do housework or farming usually assigned to women, dubbing them "rubbish men." Women who are vocal about being mistreated are also denigrated. Regardless of social or economic class, women in Papua New Guinea are considered subservient to men. Women and their work are valued only for how they contribute to a man's status.

Women have increasing access to credit facilities, infrastructure, and technology for starting their own businesses, mostly because of government intervention. Women have nominal representation in politics, law, and medicine. In 2005, only one of 109 members of parliament was female, compared to two in the previous parliament. The same woman held the only cabinet position occupied by a female. Papua New Guinea got its first woman judge in 2001, but by 2005, there were no female Supreme Court justices or provincial governors. Few women work as doctors or as business managers outside very small companies.

Nearly 75 percent of the Papua New Guinea's population is rural, and women play a major role in subsistence farming, particularly in food production and marketing. Lack of transport, literacy, communication, credit accessibility, and entrepreneurial training inhibits women's development. Urban women have better access to facilities.

Each ethnic group has its own traditions, and most regard women as subservient to men. Women in the Arapesh community fare best; their traditions teach that both sexes have equal responsibilities in reproduction and that sharing work will lead to the society's development.

There are no restrictions on dress for Papua New Guinean women. Women wear traditional, modest clothing.

Legal Rights

The Papua New Guinean Constitution offers equal rights to men and women. Customary law, however, is discriminatory and prevents women from claiming many of their rights.

Papua New Guinean women have had the universal right to vote and run for office since 1964. Women also have the right to drive vehicles, but obtaining a driver's license is often difficult. Abortion is legal only when a woman's life is endangered by the pregnancy.

Under customary law, inheritance is patrilineal. Only sons inherit land, though daughters can sometimes receive some fruit trees or personal property. Wives can't inherit property or children. In some communities, brothers of the deceased "inherit" widows.

Women in civil marriages have equal rights in initiating divorce. In most tribes, women married under customary

law can also initiate divorce or separation. Custody of children is usually given to the father and his family.

Education

Legally, women in Papua New Guinea have equal access to education, but there is a preference for sending boys to school before girls, especially in areas where facilities are limited and poverty is widespread. Only about half of women over 15 have ever gone to school, and there are about 10 percent fewer girls enrolled in primary school than boys. Less than 60 percent of women can read, compared to over 70 percent of men. About half of college students in Papua New Guinea are women, and most schools are coeducational.

Women have few employment opportunities. Men are commonly preferred over women with equal qualifications and experience. Few women achieve positions of prestige or authority.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Fathers, uncles, or brothers commonly arrange marriages for their female relatives, especially in rural areas. Traditionally, women are purchased from their parents for a bride price, usually cattle or money. Sometimes women are married to a man from another clan as a settlement of disputes between the clans.

Women can meet men only under strict chaperonage. In Papua New Guinea, an average woman marries at about 20. The legal age for marriage is 16 for girls and 18 for boys, but in remote, rural areas, child marriage remains common, and girls as young as 12 are sometimes married. Very young brides often join polygamous households and hold very low status. Polygamy is legal and commonly accepted, although it is becoming less common because of the costs involved.

Women do not hold assets separately from their husbands. They usually take their husbands' names when they marry, but often add their maiden names as well. A man is the head of the household and has full authority over his wife and children. He can reprimand a wife for any reason. Childless women are often treated very poorly.

Under civil law, men and women have equal rights to seek divorce in court. Customary law varies in Papua New Guinea's communities. In some societies, there is no tradition of divorce. In others, a woman is free to return to her father's home if her family can return the bride price or if she can show that her husband was clearly at fault. However, even women who can show that their husbands are at fault are not always welcome in their paternal homes. Also, in patrilineal tribes, women cannot retain custody of their children regardless of the circumstances surrounding the divorce.

Health

Legally, Papua New Guinean women have equal access to the healthcare system, which is poor overall, especially in rural areas. Traditions sometimes forbid women from seeking care in hospitals. Only 45 percent of pregnant

women receive treatment from trained healthcare professionals.

The maternal mortality rate is about 370 per 100,000, while the infant mortality rate was estimated at just fewer than 50 per 1000 for 2006. Most women can't make their own healthcare decisions. Only nine percent of women use modern birth control methods, which are not socially accepted and are rarely available.

Interesting Social Customs

In some rural areas, women do not speak to men who are not their husbands or fathers, and they live in separate women-only buildings.

Women in Business

General View

Papua New Guinean women are mainly involved in agricultural activities, raising children, and caring for their households, although there is an increasing female presence in a variety of income-generating activities across the country.

The patriarchal society of Papua New Guinea discriminates against women at many levels and restricts their access to various government and private development programs. Nevertheless, the efforts of government and non-governmental organizations are helping Papua New Guinean women to overcome traditional practices and attitudes and are proving to be successful in increasing their participation in business and the professions.

Legal Rights

Papua New Guinean women first got the right to vote in 1964. The Constitution of Papua New Guinea guarantees equal rights to women, but family obligations and societal perceptions prevent most women from realizing their rights. Customary laws restrain women from exercising their right to own or inherit property. Even in matrilineal societies, property goes through women to men.

despite the legal provisions and improved employment opportunities, Papua New Guinean women earn less than men in the formal as well as the informal sectors. Women's income is 57 percent less than men's income.

Women in Professions

Papua New Guinean women make up about 60 percent of the laborers in subsistence agriculture and play an important role in food production, processing, marketing, and distribution. They are also involved in weaving *bilums* (string bags) and traditional grass skirts, teaching, nursing, clerical work, and gold mining. Women rarely hold high managerial posts in organizations, irrespective of their experience or qualifications.

A few well-known women in Papua New Guinea are Julie Mota, the founder and leader of the Women Artists Network; Carolyn Leka, who owns Dujon Limited, a catering service; and Leonie Bun, chairperson of a local five-member youth group engaged in farming, processing, and exporting vanilla beans.

Although women contribute substantially to agricultural activities at all levels (the country's large revenue sector), traditional practices deny their access to land, formal training programs, and other facilities. However, the state has

adopted the World Food Summit Plan of Action to increase the number of women entrepreneurs in agriculture.

Papua New Guinean policewomen are usually given desk jobs and are legally forbidden to work in mobile squads, on riot duties, or in the dog squads. The dress code for mine workers (trousers or pants) prevents some women from working in mines or driving carrier trucks. Most Papua New Guinean women wear modest and conservative style clothing.

Working women seek the help of extended family members in childcare. Under the Government's Child Welfare Act, various childcare centers are operated in urban areas, but most women in the lower strata cannot afford the high costs of such facilities.

Women as Business Owners

Many Papua New Guinean women are active entrepreneurs in small-scale businesses relating to food production and agriculture. Rural women are involved in the production and selling of vegetables, pigs and poultry, cash crops (cocoa, coffee, copra, and vanilla beans), handicrafts, plywood production, and pottery. Urban women mostly run small shops and flea markets or have businesses in educational training, catering, or producing textiles and clothing. However, lack of business skills and specialized training, and poor access to credit facilities, impedes women's larger entrepreneurial aspirations.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Papua New Guineans tend to treat foreign businesswomen with deference. Foreign businesswomen should dress modestly and conservatively. Business meetings are casual and mostly held in offices. Locals also discuss business over lunches or dinners.

Paraguay

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In the 19th century, devastating wars wiped out the majority of Paraguay's male population. Despite the fact that women were instrumental in rebuilding the country, Paraguay is still a patriarchal society where men enjoy more rights and privileges than women. Economic and social reforms have helped women to make some progress in Paraguay over the last few decades, but it still remains the most socially and politically conservative country in Latin America.

Wealth and land is concentrated in the hands of a small upper class in Paraguay, so economic class is a very powerful force. The Roman Catholic Church is also a major sociopolitical player in the country. The net effect of both of these forces has been to delay changes to the country's status quo, thereby keeping affluent women at home and consigning the majority of women to perpetual second-class citizenship.

Since the 1990s, however, the country has seen some empowerment of women. While rural women are still very much involved in farming, often at a subsistence level, more urban women now work as commercial ranchers, wholesalers and retailers, small manufacturers, and government officials. Women are also now well represented in teaching and pharmacy professions and are playing a larger role as businesspeople. Most Paraguayan women, however, participate in the "informal" economy (which represents 38 percent of the entire Paraguayan economy), where wages are low and wage disparities between men and women are high. In the Paraguayan manufacturing sector, for instance, almost 60 percent of all employment is informal, and women earn only 53 percent of their male co-workers' wages.

The progress of women has also been slow in politics. Paraguayan women hold only 10 percent of Parliamentary seats and 31 percent of Ministerial positions.

Paraguayan women dress conservatively in suits and dresses and have a reputation for being very fashionable, regardless of their economic status.

Legal Rights

Paraguay was the last Latin American country to grant the vote to women (in 1961). Moreover, Paraguayan women did not have equality under the law until the Constitution of 1992 gave them equal rights and freedom from discrimination via amendments that allowed women to work, to travel, to divorce, and to own, buy, or sell property.

Inheritance law allows the wife to inherit her deceased husband's property as long as she wills the estate to her children upon her death. If a husband disposes of property without her consent, a wife can legally contest the husband's decision. In practice, however, men make all major decisions regarding property.

Children born of a man from the upper class and a woman from the lower class are not legally allowed to claim his inheritance or even to use their father's name.

Only children of parents with equal social standing are considered legitimate.

Paraguayan law considers any abortion a serious violation of the law.

The present Constitution allows women the right to initiate divorce, to claim custody of children, and to be granted alimony. After a divorce, mothers usually get custody of the children. The mothers of children of "consensual unions" outside of marriage are usually not entitled to support from the fathers of their children.

Education

In the 1990s, Paraguayan women were granted equal access to education. Since then, the literacy rate for women has increased to 90 percent, almost on a par with the men's rate of 93 percent. Girls receive secondary education, but only a few make it to universities. Boys and girls study in coeducational facilities but are seated separately within the classroom. Women have fewer job opportunities than men and generally find themselves limited to lower-paying jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Paraguayan women choose their own mates for marriage. Cultural norms allow girls to date starting at the age of fifteen. Women usually mingle with men in parties and other social gatherings where mothers or older siblings act as chaperones. When a man visits a girl's house on specific days and talks to her parents, it symbolizes the couple's desire to get married. Paraguayan women usually marry in their late teens or early twenties.

After marriage, women add their husbands' surnames to their paternal name by using "de" as a preposition. Men are considered to be the heads of the family and provide financial support, while women do the household chores and raise children. Childlessness carries a social stigma for women in Paraguay.

After divorce, women continue to run the household and take care of the children while their former husbands move on to a new relationship.

Although polygamy was allowed for a brief period in the 1800's, in order to repopulate the country, current laws prohibit the practice.

Health

Paraguayan women do not have equal access to the healthcare system. The system itself is in bad shape, with few functional hospitals. In 2004, 77 percent of births were assisted by trained staff, and maternal and infant mortality rates were high. Women are allowed to make decisions about their own health, but a lack of awareness about family planning and the low usage of contraceptives lead many women to have unwanted pregnancies.

Interesting Social Customs

Paraguayan children generally have both paternal and maternal surnames, indicating both parents' recognition of the child. Children with only one surname, therefore, can be easily identified as illegitimate.

Women in Business

General View

In recent years, Paraguayan women have taken an increasingly active part in the economy of their country. Women primarily find occupations in manufacturing, commerce (as saleswomen), and in providing personal services, like hairdressing and domestic help). Poverty, job segregation, discrimination in the workplace, and high illiteracy levels have kept Paraguayan women at the lower end of the labor market. Women-oriented reform laws brought in by the government have not had the desired effect.

despite the high levels of insecurity and irregularity in terms of earnings and social benefits, Paraguayan women have seen slow but steady progress in their development.

Legal Rights

Paraguay's Constitution guarantees women full equality in all respects. Women were granted the right to vote in 1961. They also have legal rights to own businesses and property. Current laws give the wife the right to inherit her deceased husband's property. The husband has the right to specify an alternative disposition of property, but his wife can legally contest his decision.

Women receive less pay than men for performing the same jobs. In Ciudad Del Este, the commercial center of Paraguay, women earn an average of \$171 per month versus the men's average monthly earnings of \$306.

Women in Professions

Paraguayan women are primarily employed in the informal manufacturing sector or work as domestic help, office workers, or sales clerks. Most single mothers are employed in cottage industries, where their earnings are meager at best.

Statistics indicate that 23 percent of Paraguay's administrators and managers in the private sector are women.

Women are not legally barred from pursuing any profession, nor do they have any dress code restrictions that prevent them from engaging in certain jobs.

There is no state-sponsored childcare available in Paraguay, so working women have to rely on private daycare centers, nannies, or relatives for childcare. Rural women have to bear the burden of work and child rearing.

Women as Business Owners

In Paraguay's conservative, male-dominated society, there are few women business owners. Women entrepreneurs are mainly engaged in small and micro-sized enterprises in the informal sector that require minimal capital investment.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Despite the *machismo* culture in Paraguay, men respect women and they seldom confront or offend them. The same holds true for foreign businesswomen, who are treated cordially.

Paraguayans give priority to personal relationships, and initial meetings are generally used to establish a good relationship between potential partners. The negotiation

process normally progresses slowly, so it is important to remain patient and to send the same company representative for negotiations.

Paraguayans expect foreign businesswomen to dress conservatively in suits or dresses. Men and women usually shake hands upon greeting. Speaking in a raised voice or behaving abruptly or aggressively is not appropriate.

Regardless of their economic status, Paraguayans are well groomed and clean, and they expect the same of their foreign guests. This includes attention to one's hair, nails, makeup, and dress.

Peru

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Even among Peru's already poor and under-employed population, women are disadvantaged. Peruvian women have a very difficult time getting an education, gaining employment, owning land or businesses, and accessing healthcare.

The view that Peru is a patriarchal society is debatable, mainly because women head about a quarter of all Peruvian households, but decades of *machismo* attitudes have ensured that any progress towards women's empowerment will be slow. The enactment of the Constitution in 1993 and the efforts of various women's groups have brought about some changes. The urban women's employment rate is above 45 percent, but Peruvian women still have a long way to go.

The government has tried to improve matters by setting up the Commission on Women and Human Development. The Commission has tried to pass laws that directly benefit women, like a bill that prohibits employers from firing a woman during her pregnancy or in the 90 days after childbirth.

Traditional misconceptions and stereotypes have limited women's access to leadership roles in the private as well as public sectors. However, studies show that women now occupy about 30 percent of management-level jobs in the public sector and about 15 percent of the jobs in decentralized public institutions. Women are also gaining representation in business, law, medicine, and politics. In fact, the presidential elections of 2006 had a female candidate, Lourdes Flores, who was narrowly beaten by her opponent in the first round of polling.

The position of women in this country is quite dependent on social and economic class. Women of higher social and economic standing are a lot more empowered than their rural counterparts. Middle-class women are now able to obtain a college education, enter the labor market, and compete against men for positions in traditionally male-dominated sectors. Women in the rural areas, on the other hand, are often sent to the fields instead of to school. Young rural women are sometimes married off when they're as young as 12, and they are more likely to suffer from domestic abuse.

The attitudes of Peruvian society are quite relaxed when it comes to women's dress styles. Urban women wear Western clothes appropriate to their work setting, and rural women often wear their colorful traditional garb both at home and at work.

Legal Rights

Constitutionally, women have the same legal rights as men in all areas including employment opportunities, marriage, divorce, property rights, and access to education. Peruvian law prohibits discrimination against women in any form. Peruvian women have the same rights as men in the areas of voting, driving, and inheriting. Although gender equality

is promised in the Constitution, the situation is, however, very different on the ground.

Although abortion is illegal in Peru, the country has one of the highest illegal abortion rates in Latin America.

Women have equal rights as men to initiate divorce proceedings and to obtain custody of their children. The financially sound partner may be ordered by the court to pay alimony to the spouse with a lower income until that spouse remarries.

Education

Although Peruvian boys and girls have equal rights to education, many low-income families send their children, including girls, to work instead of school to help relieve the family's financial burdens. As of 2004, the literacy rate of women was approximately 82 percent, compared to the male literacy rate of 94 percent.

Job opportunities for educated women are limited, although many areas once thought to be male bastions are now opening up for women. Job opportunities are more diverse and plentiful for women in urban areas.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, parents strictly controlled their daughters and found suitable matches for them. These days, however, young people choose their own spouses themselves. Peruvian girls start dating in their teens and usually meet their boyfriends in schools, at social functions, or through online dating sites.

In rural areas, the marriage age of women can be as low as 12, although the average is closer to 15. Women generally take their husband's name after marriage.

The Constitution grants women the same rights as men with regard to inheriting and owning property. Women can hold assets separately from their husbands. Polygamy is neither legally nor culturally accepted.

A large number of women in Peru are in charge of their households.

Childless women are looked down upon in Peruvian society. In case of a divorce, custody of the children may be granted to either spouse. If the woman has little or no source of income, divorce laws make it obligatory for the husband to provide alimony until the wife remarries.

Health

Peruvian laws provide for equal opportunities for women to access healthcare facilities. Prevailing standards of medical care in Peru are very poor, with the public health system suffering severe deficiencies.

Peruvian women are not permitted to make healthcare decisions without the consent of their partners.

Peru has a National Family Planning Program in place with the aim of decreasing birth rates and ensuring that all women have access to contraceptive methods. Women have easy access to a variety of birth control measures, and these measures are culturally and legally acceptable.

Women in Business

General View

Peruvian women are hard-pressed by poverty, the lack of education, inadequate healthcare facilities, and unequal employment opportunities. A *macho* society and traditional religious culture pressure women to accept secondary status, despite their major contributions to families and to the economy of the country as a whole. Women represent over 45 percent of the urban employed and a significant portion of the self-employed population, yet they are paid less and are under-represented in positions of power. An estimated 70 percent of women are employed in the lower-wage informal sector.

Better access to higher education and more opportunities for self-employment, helped by the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have enabled many women to take part in the new economy and become economically independent. Today, there are a few women, especially those from middle- and upper-middle-class families, running their own successful businesses or holding high-level jobs in private and public sectors. Women are even exploring new avenues of business distinct from the traditional agricultural-based or weaving activities.

Legal rights

Peruvian women were granted the right to vote and to run for elected office in 1955. Women have the right to own and manage property and businesses independently. They can inherit property on an equal basis with men, but in practice, women face some difficulties in obtaining their fair share of inheritances.

There is a considerable difference between the wages of men and women, although everyone is entitled to equal pay by law.

Women in Professions

About 36 percent of Peruvian women are employed full-time, compared to about 80 percent of men. Some women are employed in agriculture (6 percent) and industry (10 percent), but most work in the service sector (84 percent).

Women in Peru still limit themselves to traditionally feminine work. In rural areas this includes menial agricultural tasks, livestock breeding, weaving, and handicrafts making. In urban areas women find employment in education, health, catering, personal services, and sales. Some women also take to illegal drug trafficking or prostitution for survival. Urban women are found to earn half as much as their male counterparts.

The participation of women in politics has steadily increased, especially over the last few years. Today, women hold about 18 percent of the seats in the Parliament and 10 percent of ministerial posts. The government has taken steps to fill many positions in the legislative, executive, and judiciary sectors with female employees. By the mid-1990s, women held about 27 percent of the managerial and administrative positions, though most of them were in non-decision-making positions.

Of an estimated 134 female executives in Peru, the highest-ranking woman is prime minister Beatriz Merino Lucero. Other successful women are Lourdes Flores

Nano, president of the Popular Christian Party, and Jeanette Enmanuel, owner of a holistic medicine business.

Peruvian women are not prohibited from taking up any profession, nor do they have any particular dress code restrictions. They have a very casual but modest attitude towards dressing that generally depends on the region and the weather.

Working women either put their young children in kindergartens or appoint nannies to take care of them. There are also good day-care and preschool centers known as *nidos*. The government does not provide any childcare facilities.

Women as Business Owners

Women in Peru represent a greater section of the unemployed workforce, but about 50 percent of the women are self-employed. Today, there are many NGOs, and even government-sponsored programs like the *Mibanco*, that focus on creating entrepreneurs out of Peruvian women by providing technical, financial, and legal assistance. These provide training in various specialized courses like chocolate making, specialty coffee growing, sewing, embroidery, jewelry designing, painting, personal grooming, hairdressing, and handicraft making.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Business in Peru is fairly informal compared to that in Western countries. Punctuality is important but may not be adhered to by the Peruvians. Make appointments in advance, and have a good quantity of bilingual business cards.

Expect to exchange small talk even before a business meeting. Address people at work by their formal titles. After a strong relationship is established, the body language may include hugs or walking arm-in-arm.

Business suits and formal dresses are preferred at work. Social events call for cocktail dresses or other elegant wear. Small business gifts are acceptable but not expected. Chocolates, fine wine, or flowers would be appropriate gifts while visiting an associate at home.

Philippines

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The women of the Philippines, known as Filipinas, were traditionally expected to be good wives and mothers, nothing more. Times have changed, however, and a combination of economic necessity and legislative progress has led women to play more active roles in society. This has caused a blurring of gender lines in many traditional areas of Filipino society.

A majority of all women work, but women from the upper social and economic strata of society have better access to higher-paying jobs. Filipino women, irrespective of their social and economic class, however, are still responsible for running the household.

Women in the Philippines play active roles in politics, and two of the country's presidents have been women (Corazon Aquino, 1986-1992, and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, 2001-). Women also hold various positions of leadership in the government and hold 4 of the 24 seats in the Senate and 37 of the 236 seats in the House of Representatives. Three of the 23 members in the Cabinet are also women. In the judiciary, 5 of the 15 Supreme Court justices are women.

Healthcare and medicine is one of the areas traditionally preferred by Filipinas joining the workforce. Women are active in business, and many of them own and operate their own businesses in a wide variety of sectors.

Urban Filipinas have better opportunities and access to employment and education when compared to their rural counterparts. Rural women mostly work in the agricultural sector and are relegated to secondary roles of employment.

The position of women in certain religious and indigenous sections of society is dependent on their beliefs and customs. Muslim women, for example, have limited participation in various spheres of society due to their religious beliefs. Similarly, tribal women are expected to perform all the household chores as well as managing the farms, carrying water, and harvesting.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for Filipinas.

Legal Rights

Women in the Philippines enjoy the same legal rights as men in all respects, including the right to vote, which they gained in 1937. They also have the right to drive and to own as well as inherit property. However, the laws of specific communities, like the Muslim Personal Laws, provide their women with only half the property to which males are entitled.

Domestic abuse, rape, and sexual harassment in the workplace are serious problems in Filipino society. The Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995, the Anti-Rape Law of 1997, and the Rape Victim Assistance and Protection Act of 1998 have been enacted, but not implemented.

Abortion is illegal in the Philippines, and the only exception is when the life of the mother is at stake. Performing an abortion requires the authorization of a panel of certified professionals. However, illegal abortions are widespread and rarely prosecuted.

Divorce is not legal in the Philippines, although the wife can initiate a legal separation by providing an explicit written or verbal request. Women can claim custody of children in the event of a legal separation and it is usually granted, especially if the child is very young.

Education

The Philippine Constitution provides women with equal access to education, and the literacy rate for women and men alike is 93 percent. However, rural citizens are at a disadvantage because of the inaccessibility of educational facilities.

Most Filipinas complete elementary school, with many going on to complete secondary school. The enrollment of girls is higher than that of boys at all educational levels. Classrooms are coeducational.

Educated women do have equal access to job opportunities as the men, although they are often expected to take secretarial positions while men are expected to assume more professional roles.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

The majority of Filipino men and women choose their own spouses, although certain religious and tribal communities arrange marriages for their young people. Western-style dating is widely practiced, especially in the urban areas. Boys are expected to pursue the girls, who are expected to play hard-to-get. Dating usually begins during the early teens, and boys meet girls at various social events, educational institutions, and the streets, where youngsters hang out in groups.

The mean marriage age among Filipinas is directly proportional to their educational levels: uneducated girls marry at a median age of 18.7 years and college-educated girls at a median age of about 25 years.

Polygamy is neither socially nor legally acceptable, except in some rare cases in the Muslim community. Filipino society does generally condone the practice of men having several mistresses, however.

In most Filipino homes, it is the father who holds the power, although it is the mother who commands respect and is highly involved in the affairs of the family and child rearing. Many women are in charge of their households and are responsible for the family's finances as well. Filipinas can hold assets and property separately from their husbands.

Filipino women take their husband's names after marriage. If the woman initiates a divorce proceeding against a foreign spouse abroad, she is not entitled to revert to her maiden name, according to Philippine law.

Filipinas usually give birth to two or more children. Traditionally, childlessness was considered bad, but society no longer looks down upon childless women.

Divorce is not recognized under Philippine law. Legal separation is, however. In the event of a legal separation, Filipinas are entitled to financial support from their husbands and are usually granted custody of very young children.

Health

The Philippines has an extensive medical system, but rural women, who are usually limited by high costs, long distances, and other social hurdles, find it harder to access than urban women.

As of 2005, the maternal mortality rate stood at 172 fatalities per 100,000 live births. The infant mortality rate was 29 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Although they are legally allowed to make their own healthcare decisions, many women seek their husband's permission before seeing a doctor. This can be attributed to social and cultural customs.

Because the Philippines is a staunchly Roman Catholic country, promoting the use of contraceptives there has been, and still is, a challenge. Contraceptive usage is about 35 percent, with the most favored birth control method being the pill. Condoms are used by less than one percent of all couples.

Women in Business

General View

Filipino women, or *Filipinas*, have shed their traditional image as mothers and wives bound to the home and are now increasing their involvement in society and the country's economy. A majority of women are employed in one form or another and are as active as their male counterparts in earning money for their families.

Women entrepreneurs have a strong presence in many business sectors in the Philippines, partly due to government policies that strengthened the role of women entrepreneurs, and partly due to the unstable nature of the country's economy, which drives women into self-employment and the informal economy.

Legal Rights

Filipinas have the same legal, social, and political rights as men. They were granted the right to vote in 1937 and have unquestioned rights to own and operate businesses as well as own and inherit property.

Studies have shown that gender-based pay disparities exist in the Philippines, with female workers earning about half the salary that men earn for performing similar jobs.

Women in Professions

Traditional jobs for Filipinas are in the educational, clerical, and healthcare sectors. In rural areas, women are involved in agriculture and fishing. Many Filipinas also work as maids in the Middle East, Hong Kong, and other developed countries.

One well-known Filipina businesswoman is Teresita Sy-Coson, who is in charge of SM Prime Holdings, a company that builds and operates malls across the country. Another is Pacita U. Juan, the owner of Figaro Coffee, Inc., a chain of coffee shops that currently commands a market share of 30 percent. Doris Magsaysay Ho is a Filipina who rose to be the CEO of

Magsaysay Maritime Corporation, one of the largest companies in the Philippines.

The outlook for Filipina businesswomen is strong, with an increasing number of women climbing to the top-ranking positions of various corporations.

Women in the Philippines are not barred from any profession. There are also no dress code restrictions that prevent them from taking up any jobs.

Grandparents often assist with childcare for working women, although husbands also help. The Department of Social Welfare and Development supervises the operation of state-sponsored day-care centers run by local government units.

Women as Business Owners

About one-third of the businesses in the Philippines are owned and operated by women. Many are in the hospitality sector (restaurants and hotels), followed by trade and services, marketing, public relations, financial consulting, publishing, electronics and appliances, food and beverages, transportation, and real estate. A sizeable number of women in rural areas own small and micro-sized businesses.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen have no problems conducting business in the Philippines. Light dresses and suits are appropriate business attire for women.

Filipino business etiquette requires that you address people by their titles: for example, Attorney Cruz, Director Arroyo, or Admiral Colorado. Foreigners may want to leave dealings with the bureaucracy to the locals, who are knowledgeable in the art of negotiation through the various levels to get something accomplished. Filipinos deeply resent "losing face" in public, so be extremely tactful about embarrassing incidents or any sort of perceived rebuke.

It's impolite to refuse any food offered. After a meal, leave a few bites on the plate to show that you are full. Silence in a group is often mistaken for boredom, so it is advisable to fill silences with small talk. It's a common habit to remove one's shoes before entering a Filipino household. Treat elders with the utmost respect.

Poland

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditionally, Polish society defined women as homemakers, mothers, and wives. The Communist era brought women out of the home and into the factories and other workplaces, but the economic transition back to capitalism affected Polish women adversely. The market economy brought unemployment, and many women needed to work several jobs to make ends meet. It also widened the gap between the rich and the poor and considerably worsened the condition of lower-class women.

One of the result of this economic shift and the mass migration of many Poles to other parts of Europe is that, in many households, women now earn more than their husbands. Women fill more than 70 percent of the jobs in health, social security, finance, education, and retail sales.

Women occupy 20 percent of the seats in the upper and lower houses of Parliament, but are under-represented in the ministries. In the judiciary, women comprise the majority of judges, court presidents, and vice-presidents at lower-level courts, but few women hold senior positions in the higher courts. Women are very well represented in medicine, the one professional sector that is dominated by women. In business, women own 20 percent of the small to medium-sized businesses.

Rural women account for 37 percent of Poland's female population. In rural areas, strong patriarchal roles persist, although men do consult their wives in important family matters.

Poland is divided more along lines of class rather than ethnicity. Women from lower classes are more likely to suffer domestic violence and discrimination. Among upper-class, educated, urban families, there is greater gender equality in male-female relationships.

Legal Rights

The Polish Constitution grants women equal rights in all areas of society. Women have the right to vote, to drive vehicles, and to own and inherit property. Abortions in Poland can only be performed in situations where the life or mental or physical health of the mother is in serious danger, if the fetus is severely impaired, or if the pregnancy is the result of a rape or incest.

The serious problems of domestic violence and sexual harassment are still not fully addressed by the legal system. Polish women have the right to initiate divorce proceedings. In a divorce, women, more often than not, receive custody of their children.

Education

Polish women have had equal access to education for quite some time, and women have a strong presence in many professions such as architecture, engineering, and university teaching. Although Polish women have equal employment opportunities, gender-based discrimination prevents most women from rising up the ranks to hold high-level posts.

Both men and women in Poland have a literacy rate of 99.8 percent. A large number of Polish women complete secondary school and go on to universities. 56 percent of university graduates in Poland are women, and Polish women have higher levels of education than men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Polish women are normally allowed to choose their own husbands, although the practice of arranged marriages still exists in some areas. Dating is permitted, and Polish girls usually start dating in their late teens. Young men and women meet at various social events or may sometimes socialize in groups. The practice of dating on the Internet is slowly gaining popularity.

Polish women generally marry in their mid-twenties. A woman can decide whether or not she wants to take her husband's name after marriage. If she decides to retain her family name, she has to make an official declaration of this desire. Childlessness or infertility does not carry a stigma in Poland. In fact, an increasing number of Polish women are staying voluntarily childless for longer periods of time, mostly for economic reasons.

Although Polish men have traditionally been seen as the heads of the households, women are usually in charge of all household functions. Upon marriage, all assets and acquired property become the joint property of husband and wife. In a divorce, both spouses are entitled to equal shares in the joint property.

In matters of child custody, the court typically grants custody to one of the parents and restricts the parental responsibility of the other parent. As for child support, both parents are legally bound to cover their children's expenses.

Health

Poland provides free medical services connected with pregnancy, birth, and post-natal healthcare. There are no restrictions in access to medical services for women. Following the dramatic fall in the number of births, maternity wards were downsized and many rural maternity rooms were completely replaced by hospitals. Poland's maternal mortality rate is 13 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is around seven deaths for every 1,000 live births.

Polish women are legally permitted to make their own healthcare decisions, although most women prefer to take such decisions after consultations with their husbands. A very small percentage of Polish women use contraception and a survey showed that lack of information, cultural and religious restrictions, and high costs were some of the barriers that prevented the use of contraceptives.

Interesting Social Customs

Weddings in Poland are held in the home of the bride or, if her parents are absent, in the home of her relatives. The wedding day usually begins with musicians going to the groom's home and playing him some sad tunes. Just before going to the church, the couple kneels before the bride's parents and receives their blessings, along with a sprinkling of holy water.

Women in Business

General View

Women constitute almost half the labor force in Poland, but only 34 percent of them work full-time outside the home. This is due in great part to Polish society's conservative gender role stereotypes that regard men as the primary breadwinners and women as caretakers of the home and children. Even educated women with professional careers outside the home as doctors, teachers, and accountants bear most of the responsibility for shopping and housework.

Furthermore, the number of women in low-paid positions in Poland far exceeds the number of men. The situation, however, is changing. A 2001 survey revealed that women were more likely than men to start a new business. Mass migration of Poles to work in other European countries, many of them educated female medical professionals and young women working in childcare, is also changing the dynamics of the Polish workplace.

Legal Rights

Polish women have had the right to vote since 1918, and the Constitution provides women with equal rights in all areas of life, allowing women to own businesses and own or inherit property.

Gender-based pay disparities exist in Poland; on average, women receive about 70 percent of men's pay for performing the same job.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Polish women have been employed in agriculture, industry, and the public sector. In agriculture, women make up one-fifth of the principal managers of farms. Most industrial work is in light manufacturing. Women's public sector work is in social services and healthcare. Private sector work is concentrated in the banking, finance, and insurance sector. In the professions, women are very well represented in architecture, engineering, and university teaching.

There are quite a few female heads of companies in Poland. A survey revealed that Polish women hold more than 50 percent of the managerial posts in various industrial and economic enterprises.

A few examples of successful Polish businesswomen include Wanda Rapaczynski, the president of Agora, Central Europe's large print and radio company; interior designer Magdalena Xardel; Ewa Plucinska, who runs the consulting firm EVIP; and Dorota Drownowska and Malgosia Kujawska, who jointly run the *Instytut Kształcenia Obcokrajowcow* language school.

The labor code prohibits women from working in underground mines and in jobs that require lifting weights above a specified limit. Some restrictions also apply to pregnant women.

Siblings, relatives, babysitters, and kindergartens are available for child care. Many of the subsidized day-care centers of the Communist period have closed, and the remaining centers, in their bid to become self-supporting, have raised their prices sharply. A recent trend in Polish society has been that fathers are increasingly involved in childcare at home.

Women as Business Owners

A fairly large number of new businesses in Poland today are owned by women and are doing quite well. Currently, over two million small businesses have been started in Poland, and nearly half a million of them were initiated and run by women.

Women are involved in the manufacturing and service sectors and own about 20 percent of the small to medium-sized businesses. Self-employed women are more likely to concentrate on agricultural activity. Rural women initiate business in handicrafts, agro-tourism, and processing and selling agricultural products.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Women business travelers visiting Poland are not treated any differently from men. Handshakes are a norm on arrival and when taking leave. When meeting a Pole, it is customary to use the word *pan* (sir) before a man's last name or *pani* (madam) before a woman's last name. First names are used upon mutual agreement when both people are well acquainted. Polish men, the elderly in particular, kiss the back of the hands of women associates as a sign of respect. Poles are direct and friendly, but generally dislike brashness and close physical contact. They prefer to deal directly with a business associate rather than going through a middleman.

There are no special clothing requirements for Poland except those imposed by cold weather.

Portugal

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditionally, Portuguese society relegated women to subordinate roles with few legal rights, making women dependant on men for all their needs. This was especially true in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, until the Revolution of 1974. Portugal's society is traditionally patriarchal, with men dominating society and making all important decisions, including those concerning the children.

Since 1976, Portugal's women have had more rights and increasingly participate in all aspects of Portugal's society. Women play important roles in Portugal's economic and social sectors.

Although class is less important in Portugal today than in the past, upper-class women can often use social connections to get a good job or improve their situation. Middle-class women may improve their lives through education, while the poor have few opportunities. The Portuguese Constitution guarantees equality regardless of class.

The role of Portuguese women in society is changing, with more women becoming educated and taking jobs, and even dominating in a few sectors. As of 2005, Portuguese women made up 20 percent of all government ministers and held 19.5 percent of the total seats in Parliament. Women are 70 percent of the medical students and half of all hospital doctors. Forty-eight percent of Portugal's entrepreneurs are women, well above the global average of 38 percent.

Rural Portuguese women have limited access to education and employment opportunities. Urban women, on the other hand, are better educated and make up a sizeable portion of Portugal's workforce. There are no dress code restrictions for Portuguese women, but formal attire is expected at the workplace.

Legal Rights

Portuguese women enjoy the same legal rights as the men under the Constitution. The Commission for Equality and Women's Rights, attached to the prime minister's office, ensures the implementation of these rights. Portuguese women received the right to vote in 1934 with certain restrictions; they won full voting rights in 1976. Portuguese women have the right to drive and can own and inherit property.

Abortion is legal to save a woman's life or protect her mental or physical health. It is also permitted in cases of rape or fetal impairment. Portuguese women can initiate divorce and seek custody of their children.

Education

Women have equal rights and access to education, and increasing numbers of girls are taking advantage of educational opportunities. As of 2003, the literacy rate for Portuguese women was 91.3 percent, compared to 95.5 percent for men.

Ninety-nine percent of Portuguese girls enroll in primary school. Most Portuguese women complete their

secondary education, and many of them pursue higher education. Almost 60 percent of university graduates younger than 30 are women.

Although more women are working, they do not have the same opportunities as men. Women earn about 30 percent less than men, in spite of the fact that more of them work in traditionally male-dominated fields. Discrimination against pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace is a persistent problem.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

People choose their own spouses in Portugal. Young people start dating as early as 14 or 15 years of age. Portuguese men and women usually meet at social events and at school. Most women marry in their early to mid-twenties. Most Portuguese women retain their maiden names, though they may take their husband's name with the permission of the registrar of marriages.

Portuguese law recognizes civil unions between people who have lived together for more than two years. Polygamy, however, is neither legally nor socially acceptable in Portugal.

Although traditionally men were in charge of the Portuguese households, today many women manage their own homes. Portuguese society does attach a stigma to childlessness, and some women prefer to remain childless. The birth rate is about 1.5 children per woman.

In divorce, the spouses can divide conjugal property and decide custody of children and alimony themselves. If they cannot agree, they go to court. Women have a good chance of receiving custody of their children. Portuguese women can hold property separately from their husbands during marriage and retain it after divorce.

Health

Women have equal access to healthcare, and the government provides all children below the age of 15 with free or low-cost healthcare. Almost all births take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. Recent maternal mortality rates were 5 deaths per 100,000 live births. Estimated infant mortality rates for the 2006 were just fewer than 5 deaths per 1,000.

Portuguese women usually make their own healthcare decisions. Contraceptives are widely available and commonly used.

Interesting Social Customs

Upper class or highly educated Portuguese women are often referred to by the title of Dona, followed by their first name.

Women in Business

General View

Portuguese women were traditionally excluded from much of Portugal's social and economic life, but since 1974 they have been granted equal rights and permitted access to all areas of Portuguese society, including the business sector.

As a result, women's employment rate rose from 20 percent in the 1960s to the current rate of 75 percent.

Legal Rights

Portugal's Constitution grants women all the legal rights that men enjoy. Voting rights were first granted to Portuguese women in 1934, although with certain restrictions. Full voting rights were granted in 1976. The Constitution also grants women the right to own businesses and to own and inherit property.

Portuguese women receive lower salaries than men performing the same job. According to studies conducted in 2001, the average gap in pay packages was 77 percent, although this gap narrowed at the higher levels of employment. The pay gap was 88 percent for unskilled workers and 73 percent for management level positions.

Women in Professions

Traditional jobs for Portuguese women are in healthcare, education, and other service jobs, as well as in agriculture and the manufacture of ceramics and handicrafts.

Women occupied only about five percent of senior level management positions in 1998, but this figure is increasing as women slowly ascend the employment ladder into corporate decision-making roles. Well-known Portuguese women include the artist Berta Simões Monteiro and the poet Sophia de Mello Breyner

The only professions from which Portuguese women are barred are certain combat positions in the military.

Most working Portuguese women use the services of crèches or day-care centers to care for their children. Government childcare is available at a heavily subsidized price. Children may also be taken care of by their extended family.

Women as Business Owners

About 48 percent of Portugal's entrepreneurs are women and, surprisingly, a majority of them are less than 34 years old. Entrepreneurs come from all walks of life in Portugal.

Women-owned enterprises usually focus on consumer and business services, although women are also active in traditionally male sectors like construction, transportation, manufacturing, and wholesale distribution.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are usually treated with fairness and respect in Portugal. Most young business managers these days speak English, but an interpreter who can translate documents may be useful. Treat people in senior positions with respect and be formal in your communications with them, using their professional title (e.g., *Engenheiro*, *Doctor*) when appropriate and *Senhor* or *Senhora* when there is no professional title.

Business suits are worn at work and dress is conservative for social functions. When dining, remember that table manners are formal so do not begin eating until the host says *bom apetito*.

Qatar

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Qatari women enjoy legal equality on a par with men, but Qatar remains a male-dominated society. In spite of Qatari women's affluence and Constitutional legal protection, social and cultural constraints limit their social and economic status. In particular, Islamic customary laws and traditions hold supremacy over Constitutional laws, and this directly leads to discrimination against women.

This discrimination takes the form of domestic violence, sexual harassment, polygamy, and gender bias regarding inheritance, child custody, and other family laws. For instance, under Islamic law, the testimony of a woman is only valued half as much as a man's. The law is also lenient towards "honor crimes," in which a woman accused of jeopardizing a family's honor is killed by one of the family's male members.

Although Qatar has a high standard of living, a number of women live in lower income groups. Women from these groups account for about 47 percent of the total recipients of social insurance, and almost all female-headed households fall under this category.

Women in Qatar are, however, attaining more economic, legal, and social independence through education and employment. The state has undertaken many initiatives to change the status of women in society. The Supreme

Council for Family Affairs has helped to make major amendments to the law and accelerate the pace of change to some extent.

In politics, there is just one female minister and a few other women who occupy important posts like the president of the Election Committee, Deputy Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, head of the General Authority for Health, and member of the Central Municipal Council. In the judiciary, women work in the Ministry of Justice as legal advisors and in other posts. The number of Qatari businesswomen, at just around 3,600, is very limited. Their participation in medicine has increased tremendously in the last decade, with more than 50 percent of physicians in Qatar being women.

Qataris are usually divided according to tribal affiliations and genealogical links. The position of women does not differ much among these groups. Qatar also has a large population of expatriates, mostly from South Asia. The position of women in these communities depends on their individual cultures

Qatari women are required to dress conservatively in public or in the presence of men outside the family, covering themselves from head to toe in line with strict Islamic practices.

Legal Rights

Constitutionally, Qatari women have the same legal rights as men. They were granted the right to vote in 1999. They

can drive cars and own or inherit land and property. Islamic customary laws and social traditions often supersede these legal rights, however.

Women have limited reproductive rights. Abortions are allowed only to save the woman's life, to protect her physical or mental health, or in the case of severe fetal impairment.

Qatari women can initiate divorce, but customary laws prevent women who initiate a divorce from being awarded the custody of children. A woman can retain custody only of her minor children, whom she has to hand over to her husband once they attain adolescence.

Education

Qatar provides free and compulsory education for all citizens under 18 years of age until the intermediate level. The literacy rates for men and women are the same, at 89 percent. Almost all Qatari girls complete primary school, with a majority of them going on to complete their intermediate levels of schooling as well. Girls and boys attend school separately.

Since Qatari women limit themselves to certain traditionally female courses of study, they are disadvantaged in the job market. However, with increased enrollment in higher education, more women are becoming economically active and their share in the labor force is increasing.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Marriages in Qatar are arranged by the parents, although many women have the freedom to accept or reject a proposal. Marriages between Qataris and non-Gulf people are not supported, even by the state. Dating is not socially acceptable. Young people are not allowed to meet or socialize with the opposite sex in public places.

The minimum legal marriageable age for Qatari girls is 18 years. Although polygamy is legally and socially acceptable, its incidence has reduced in recent years due to the high costs involved. Moreover, a wife can initiate divorce on the ground that her husband practices polygamy.

Women have a major role in the household, taking care of the entire family and house. Modern women are also taking an active part in the economics of the house. Women in Qatar are allowed to own and manage property and assets independently. Arab women generally do not change their name after marriage.

Islam values children, and Muslim women are expected to have several of them. Qatari women are no exception, and infertility can cause a woman to face social stigma.

Women can initiate divorce and claim custody of minor children. Adolescent children will, however, be under their father's custody. Women are eligible for maintenance payments if the husband initiates the divorce.

Health

The state of Qatar offers many free and specialized healthcare services to its citizens. Women are entitled to a total maternity care program including primary care and hospitalization services. There are well-equipped medical centers throughout the country with efficient medical staffs.

Almost 100 percent all births in Qatar take place under medical supervision. The maternal mortality rate is 10 deaths per 100,000 live births and the infant mortality rate is 18 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Women are free to make their own healthcare decisions, including family planning. Birth control services are offered in government hospitals, and statistics indicate that about 43 percent of Qatar's women use some form of contraception.

Interesting Social Customs

Although women have the legal right to travel abroad, male family members can prevent them from doing so by giving the woman's name to immigration officials at departure points. Even women who do travel abroad are usually accompanied by a male escort.

Women in Business

General View

Qatari women are working in ever-greater numbers, with their labor force participation now at 38 percent. Within this group the number of women in higher positions, in both public and private sectors, has been increasing. Women are also actively involved in new business ventures either as owners or as shareholders.

The growth in activity is due to better educational standards, initiatives in recent years to induce more women to take up self-employment, and the government's privatization policies.

Legal Rights

Women were granted the right to vote in Qatar in 2003. All Qatari citizens have the rights to own and manage property, land, and businesses. However, women are discriminated against under *Shari'a* inheritance laws, under which they are eligible to inherit only half of what the male family members are granted.

Qatari women generally receive equal pay as the men for doing the same work.

Women in Professions

There is significant occupational segregation in Qatar. The service sector and the government employ almost 100 percent of the female working population. Women are generally limited to low-paid clerical, teaching, and healthcare positions. Only recently have they been allowed to enroll in the police force and in professional sports like soccer.

There are few women at the top levels in both the public and private sectors. A Qatari woman's eligibility to become an ambassador or judge is determined by the Emir. An increasing number of women are entering newer sectors like media, journalism, finance, business management, banking, and insurance. A prominent example of a famous Qatari businesswoman is Sheikha Hanadi bin Nasser bin Khalid al-Thani, the managing director and vice chairman of Amwal Company.

The outlook for the growth of Qatari women in business is bright, with new measures and laws resulting in an increasing number of female entrepreneurs. The pace of growth, however, is likely to be slow.

Qatari women are prohibited from working in jobs that are classified as "hard, hazardous, unsafe, or morally harmful." However, there are no specific jobs that have been categorized as such. Although Qatari women dress conservatively, there are no specific dress code restrictions that prevent them from taking up certain jobs.

There is no state-sponsored childcare available in Qatar, so working women usually entrust childcare to members of the extended family. Upper-class families make use of foreign nannies.

Women as Business Owners

The few thousand Qatari businesswomen have made their presence felt in many sectors, including manufacturing, shipping, heavy industries, fashion, malls, and cosmetics. Governmental and non-governmental organizations have introduced several initiatives in recent years to induce more women to start businesses.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Qataris are hospitable and courteous towards foreign business people, especially women, but because the business sector in Qatar has few women, some foreign businesswomen might feel out of place.

Plan visits and schedule meetings according to the Islamic calendar. Business meetings can be rather slow, intercepted by long pauses of silence. Guests should avoid making unsolicited comments, especially on sensitive topics like politics.

Men and women maintain a visible physical distance in public, where even shaking hands is unacceptable. Most public places have separate entrances, counters, and even buildings for men and women. Eating, drinking, and smoking in public places during Ramadan is prohibited. Avoid using the left hand for eating or for giving and receiving anything. Accept food, especially coffee, when it is offered. After drinking coffee, shake the cup and hand it back with the right hand to avoid continuous refills.

While sitting, women should take care not to show the soles of their feet to men. Business attire should cover the shoulders and knees, but otherwise can be typical Western businesswear.

Romania

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Romanian women are expected to be mothers, and they experience discrimination whenever they assume any other role in society. The society is patriarchal, and men tend to dominate.

Although many women work outside the home, they are fully responsible for housework and children as well. It is expected that men will take care of their wives, even when the women in question are well-educated and able to care for themselves. Social class does not particularly affect women's rights.

Under Communism, women were granted equal rights in marriage and work for the first time. Government campaigns to increase the population burdened women with unwanted children, however, often keeping them out of the workplace. Today, although paternal attitudes persist, women are working outside the home more and occasionally achieving better positions.

Traditional attitudes keep women from participating in politics. In 2005, of 332 deputies, only 37 were women, while 13 of 137 senators were women. There were only three female ministers in the 24-member cabinet. More women than men enroll in law school, but they rarely advance to influential jobs in the judiciary. Not many Romanian women own businesses, and even fewer work as high-level managers.

Urban women have better job opportunities and more privileges than rural women, who frequently have very traditional lifestyles. Women in the Roma minority experience additional discrimination wherever they live.

There are no dress code restrictions in Romania. In urban areas, women wear what they please. Rural women may still wear traditional long skirts and embroidered vests, and cover their hair after they're married.

Legal Rights

The Equality for Women and Men Act of 2002 prohibits any discrimination based on gender. Romanian women have the right to vote, to drive, and to buy or sell property at will. Traditionally, the oldest son inherited all property, but women are legally entitled to inheritance. Laws protecting women's rights are rarely enforced, though.

Abortion is completely legal in Romania, as long as it is performed in a licensed facility. Romanian women have the right to initiate divorce and to seek custody of their children.

Education

The Romanian Constitution guarantees women equal access to education. The literacy rate of Romanian women is almost 98 percent, compared to 99 percent for men.

Most girls complete both primary and secondary education, but girls' dropout rates are higher than boys', particularly in rural areas. Romanian boys and girls share the same classroom space.

Women are supposed to have equal access to employment, but are unemployed at a higher rate than men, and are laid off more quickly in times of economic uncertainty. Women tend to work in lower-level jobs in fields that are traditionally dominated by women, like education, and they generally earn less than men with the same qualifications.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Most Romanian women are free to choose their own partners, though matchmakers arrange marriages in some rural communities. Girls start dating while in their teens. Women meet men at school, through family and friends, and at social events.

The minimum legal age for marriage for women is 16. Most women marry in their early twenties. Most Romanian women take their husband's family name after marriage, though they are not required to do so by law.

Regardless of the amount of work they do outside the home, women have to take full responsibility for all domestic chores and child rearing duties. Romanians consider children a vital part of marriage. Traditional beliefs about infertility often burden childless women with a social stigma. Small families are acceptable, though.

Upon divorce, the couples can divide their assets by common agreement or through a court order. If their house is joint property, one spouse usually keeps the house, paying an equal share of money to the other spouse. Mothers frequently receive the custody of the children, in which case the father is usually required to pay child support.

Any property a woman acquires before marriage remains her personal property. Anything acquired after marriage is joint property, over which husband and wife have equal rights.

Health

Legally, Romanian women have equal access to the country's healthcare system. In rural areas, medical facilities are limited, leaving women and men with poor access to health care.

Almost all births in Romania take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant, and the current maternal mortality rate is about 49 deaths per 100,000 live births. The estimated infant mortality rate for 2006 is over 25 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Women usually make their own health care decisions. Contraceptive use is gradually increasing; about 64 percent of all Romanian women use some form of contraception.

Interesting Social Customs

Some Roma communities still continue the practice of forced marriage. Children as young as 10 or 12, who may not know each other, can be forced into marriage.

Women in Business

General View

Romanian society has long confined women to homemaking and traditionally female jobs, but the shift to a market economy has led to huge changes in the lives of Romanian women. Women make up almost half of the full-time workforce (45 percent), and educated Romanian women compete head-to-head with men in their workplaces, especially in the growing IT sector where an impressive 13 percent of Romania's women now work as software professionals.

While women hold 26 percent of executive positions in Romania, they are rare in the very top leadership positions; this appears to be due to a prejudice against female leaders. In fact, a survey indicated that nearly half the population viewed men as more dynamic leaders than women. The government is now addressing this issue.

Legal Rights

Romanian women have the same legal rights as men, including the right to vote, which was granted in 1929. Romania's legal provisions allow women to own or inherit property and to run their own businesses.

Although women are legally entitled to earn equal pay for equal work done, women earn about 76 percent as much

as men. While the gap is closing overall, it is still higher in lower tiers of employment.

Women in Professions

A large number of women work in certain traditionally female sectors: healthcare and social services (75 percent), teaching (67 percent), and industry/textile (43 percent). Agricultural work on family farms also involves a majority of female labor, although data is sketchy on this informal sector. Many women also work in clerical jobs, forestry, restaurants, real estate, the law, and the IT sector. Increased government support for skill-building efforts in various fields has led to gradual growth in women's participation in the nation's economy.

A few famous Romanian businesswomen include Maria Grapini, who runs a medium-sized enterprise that manufactures and trades haberdashery and confectionery; Mihaela Marina Belcin, owner of a garment manufacturing unit; and Gabriela Chirac, whose factory manufactures aluminum structures.

Romanian women are restricted to non-combat roles in the military.

Romanian women normally wear Western outfits and there are no dress code restrictions that prevent them from taking up certain jobs.

State-run childcare centers are available in Romania. Most of them are, however, relics from the Communist era and are poorly staffed, badly maintained and overcrowded. Working women usually entrust childcare to the grandparents of the child, and the more affluent hire babysitters.

Women as Business Owners

About 40,000 Romanian women own business enterprises. Most of them are small or medium-sized garment factories, restaurants, and consulting firms. A few women have started successful large firms in the pharmaceutical and entertainment industries as well.

Russia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The position of women in Russian society has changed dramatically since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Once at the forefront of the movement for gender equality in all forms, women took a back seat when Russia returned to a capitalist system. More than nostalgia for Russia's traditionally patriarchal society, it was the cold economic truth of chronic unemployment that turned back the clock for women. When job opportunities finally opened up, men were usually the first in the family to get them and women were left with fewer and less attractive employment options. Out of necessity, women persevered, and some 92 percent of Russian women now work to contribute income to their families.

The status of women in Russian society has, however, undergone noticeable changes of late. Higher levels of education and better training have allowed women to get promoted to top-level positions in companies and to break into male-dominated professions like engineering, science, and technology.

Women currently hold 9.8 percent of the 450 seats in the State Duma (lower house of Parliament) and 3.4 percent of the 178 seats in the Federal Council (upper house of Parliament). Women have a substantial presence in Russia's judicial system, making up more than 75 percent of the judiciary's total employees, including judges and chairpersons of courts, 23 out of 81 chairpersons of arbitration, and 97 out of 112 judges of the arbitration courts. Moreover, three women have been chairpersons of the Supreme Court. In medicine, the lowest paid profession, nearly 70 percent of the practicing doctors are women. Female business participation is relatively low in Russia, with women owning or managing only 1.6 percent of the country's businesses, although this doesn't take into account the large informal economy in the country.

A Russian woman's access to education and employment depends a lot on the wealth of her family and her geographic location. Young rural women form 63 percent of Russia's rural unemployed population and face poor living and job conditions, health issues, patriarchy, and higher death rates than urban women.

There are no dress code restrictions for Russian women. Women mostly follow European dressing styles.

Legal Rights

Russia's Constitution guarantees its women and men equal rights in all spheres. Russian women received the right to vote in 1918. Women also have the right to drive vehicles and the right to possess and inherit property.

Abortion is legally permitted in Russia as long as it is performed by a licensed practitioner.

A large number of Russian women are subject to domestic abuse, and a staggering 14,000 are said to die in acts of domestic violence every year, according to Amnesty International.

The civil marriage law allows both women and men to initiate divorce, either by mutual consent or by unilateral request to the court. In a divorce, custody of children can be mutually decided by the couple or awarded by the court after considering the children's interests and the economic position of each parent. Children aged ten years and above are free to choose the parent with whom they want to reside.

Education

Russian law offers equal educational opportunities to all men and women, although it is neither free nor compulsory. Access to higher education is constrained by the student's financial status and the results of the entrance examinations, but the majority of those enrolled in higher education are women.

Russia's female adult literacy rate is 99 percent versus the men's rate of 100 percent. Women's educational levels are gradually improving, with more than 99 percent of Russian girls completing their fifth grade and 40 percent of Russia's young women attending universities.

Despite women's increasing levels of education and economic participation, they are almost always hired for low-status and low-paid jobs, while men continue to dominate the high-paid, top-level positions in almost all professions.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Women choose their own partners, and inter-cultural marriages are not uncommon in the Russian society.

Girls and boys usually begin dating when they reach their late teens. Young women typically meet men at educational institutions, the workplace, and at social events. Although the legal age for marriage is 18 years, Russian women usually marry during their mid-twenties. Cohabitation is fairly widespread among young people.

Couples often share their surnames after marriage, especially by having the woman add the suffix *-a* to her husband's last name. Some couples keep their own surnames. In case of a divorce, women may or may not remove the husband's name.

Polygamy is legally prohibited in Russia, but it is still practiced among the Muslim community in the Caucasus region and Central Asia.

In Russia, women take charge of all domestic activities, and men have a minimal role in managing the household. Russian women can legally hold assets separate from their husbands. There are also a growing number of female single-parent households.

Childlessness in married women is considered a major defect, even though Russian families are having fewer and fewer children.

The divorce rate in Russia is among the world's highest. After a divorce, the possibility of remarriage for Russian women is low. The custody of children can be decided by the couples themselves or by a court.

Health

Russia's health system offers women and men equal access to the country's medical services. The government has made healthcare for women and children a priority, and all regional medical institutions have special doctors for gynecological and obstetrical care, as well as professional assistance for births.

Russia's maternal mortality rate currently stands at 23.4 deaths per 100,000 live births. The infant mortality rate is 11 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Russian women make their own healthcare decisions and have legal access to family planning services, abortion, and contraceptives. Due to the high costs of birth control services in Russia, however, many women from the poorer sections of society have refrained from using such services. The country's abortion rate is among the highest in the world, and the population growth rate is among the lowest.

Interesting Social Customs

There is a tradition of elopement whereby Russian women are "kidnapped," usually by her lover in cases where the parents refuse her marriage, and married to the kidnapper. Traditional customs declare such a woman to be "damaged" and unfit to marry anybody other than her kidnapper.

Women in Business

General View

Russian women make up nearly half of the country's workforce (47 percent), but primarily occupy lower-wage jobs in healthcare, education, social work, and office administration. This is mostly due to the major socio-economic changes in the 1990s as Russia transitioned from communism to capitalism, leaving many of the country's skilled and educated women workers unemployed or underemployed. This transition exacerbated existing wage disparities to the point where women earned only 50 percent as much as men in 2000, a 20 percent decrease from the 1980s.

The improvement in the economic environment of the country, coupled with social development and globalization, has paved the way, however, for Russian women to participate far more actively in the social, economic, and public life of Russia. It remains to be seen how much lost ground women will recoup, but a buoyant economy may help them to get back on track.

Legal Rights

The Russian Constitution guarantees women equal rights in all areas. Russian women received the right to vote in 1918, and women have equal rights of inheritance entitling them to own any kind of property or business enterprise.

Although Russian law ensures women equal pay for equal work, in reality their actual pay is substantially less than that of their male counterparts.

Women in Professions

Russian women constitute 85 percent of the workforce in the country's public health service (including the vast majority of doctors) and 81 percent of the educational

sector. Their contribution is also relatively high in the field of finance, credit information, and accounting services, but they are poorly represented in the construction industry.

Studies show that one-third of working women of Russia are managers and they play an important role in the management of small and medium-sized businesses.

A few noteworthy Russian female entrepreneurs are Marina J. Korneva, who runs JSC StroyFin Partnership, a medium-sized enterprise that deals in raw materials and food products supply; Geppa Vera Vitalevna, who owns Vera Geppa Fashion Center, a small enterprise that specializes in fashion design, manufacturing clothing, organizing fashion shows, and training designers; and Marina Krokchina, the general director of the "Kaluga-Moscow" Inter-regional Marketing Center, a micro-enterprise that provides consultancy services in the field of marketing, management, and legal services for large-scale investment projects.

Russian law prohibits women from working under difficult, hazardous or dangerous conditions, or at night. Pregnant women and those with small children are not allowed to work overtime, nights, or on holidays, and they are not sent on business trips.

Working mothers normally rely on the help of immediate family members for childcare. State-sponsored childcare is available in Russia, but it is not adequate to meet the country's needs.

Women as Business Owners

Statistics show that Russian women own approximately 40 percent of the total registered businesses in the country. These businesses are chiefly in the service sector, catering, textiles, food processing, and the retail trade. Some have also ventured into male-dominated sectors such as manufacturing and construction. There are, of course, still a lot of unregistered enterprises in Russia, and women play a large role in this informal economy as well.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Generally, foreign businesswomen are received with due respect in Russia. Russian business culture is formal. Business negotiations are long, and meetings often run late. It is important to make appointments well in advance and confirm them a few days prior to the meeting, as cancellations on short notice are common. Do not try to schedule meetings during the first week of May.

While shaking hands with Russians, direct eye contact is a must. Avoid shaking hands across the threshold of the door, as it is believed to bring bad luck and can lead to arguments. Visiting foreign women are expected to dress modestly in business suits, dresses, or pant suits.

Rwanda

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women in traditional Rwandan society, although not equal to men, had modest political and economic power, which disappeared during colonial rule. In postwar Rwanda, women are still expected to be wives and mothers first, though they increasingly play an active role in public life. Rwanda remains a patriarchal, patrilineal society.

Rwandan women work in the fields and take care of the household and children. These tasks determine their value in Rwandan society, and girls are brought up from an early age to fulfill these roles by being docile and submissive to men. Women were treated with extraordinary brutality during the recent civil war.

Women are increasingly active in Rwanda's public life, partly because there are fewer men in postwar Rwanda, and partly because of changing attitudes towards women. One effect of the war has been a change in traditional gender roles, and women now head many Rwandan households. However, traditional customs, beliefs, and prejudices continue to affect women's day-to-day lives.

Rwanda has the highest representation rates for women in politics in the world. Thirty percent of parliamentary seats are reserved for women, and in a recent election, women took almost half the seats in the lower house and over one-third of the seats in the upper house. Women are active in the judiciary; 41 percent of the Supreme Court judges as well as the Minister of Justice are women. Many women also work as nurses in the country's 360 medical centers; there is a shortage of doctors, and only a small percentage of doctors are women. Many Rwandan women, especially those from the urban areas, are active in business.

Urban women have better access to educational facilities and jobs outside the home. Rural women are more commonly bound by traditional customs and lack educational and employment opportunities.

Legal Rights

Rwandan women were granted the right to vote in 1961. Legally, women have equal rights. However, local customary laws are followed in most areas of Rwanda, and many of these are discriminatory. For example, civil law allows women to inherit and own property, but customary law is used to settle most property disputes. As a result, it is still difficult for women to claim property ownership, especially in rural areas.

Abortions can be performed to save a woman's life or physical or mental health. Any abortion requires the consent of two physicians, who must confirm the dangers in writing.

Women can now legally initiate divorce, while before the war, they could not. Rwandan women may also claim to custody of their children.

Education

Girls and boys have the same rights to education, but poverty prevents many Rwandan children, especially girls, from going to school. Less than 65 percent of

Rwandan women can read and write, compared to 70 percent of men. Girls make up half the students in Rwanda's primary schools, but only 46 percent go on to secondary school and 29 percent to higher education. Societal pressures and early marriages cause girls to leave school sooner than boys.

Educated Rwandan women do not have the same access to prestigious or high-level jobs as men with the same qualifications, although they fare better than women in many other countries.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Most young people in Rwanda today choose their own spouses, though they must usually get approval from their families. Although dating is not formally a part of Rwandan society, young couples in the cities date "Western-style." Women start dating in their teens, meeting men through family and friends, at school, at work, or at social events. Group activities where men and women get a chance to meet are more common than dating.

The legal marriage age for men and women in Rwanda is 21, and that's also the average age at which Rwandan women marry. About 20 percent of girls marry before they're 18. Polygamy was common in Rwandan traditional society, but today it is illegal and has largely disappeared.

Rwandan women take their husband's names after marriage. Rwandan culture traditionally designated men as the head of the household. However, partly due to the genocide and partly due to changes in society, 34 percent of Rwandan women now head their own households.

Children are considered a sign of prosperity in Rwanda, so the stigma attached to childlessness can be overwhelming. Men are likely to divorce infertile wives. In divorce, women are legally entitled to a share of the conjugal property. Women have the same right to claim custody of their children as men.

Rwanda's laws allow a woman to hold assets in her own name. However, in practice, inheriting or owning property or land is extremely difficult for women, with property almost always shared among the sons.

Health

Rwandan women have equal access to healthcare, but facilities are limited. Rural Rwandan women usually do not make their own healthcare decisions, but urban women are increasingly autonomous.

Most women receive some prenatal care, but only 26 percent of babies are delivered in a health care facility. Rwanda's maternal mortality ratio for 2004 stood at 1,100 deaths per 100,000 live births. The estimated infant mortality rate for 2006 was almost 90 per 1,000.

An average Rwandan woman gives birth to more than five children. Birth control is available, but access is poor. Although the government's family planning policies faced opposition at first, the enormous pressure on agricultural land by the population soon led to acceptance of the policies. Contraceptive prevalence is low; only 14 percent of the urban women and 2.6 percent of the rural women use some form of modern contraception.

Interesting Social Customs

In traditional households, men usually sit on chairs while women and children sit on the floor. Men eat first, with women and children eating later.

Women in Business

General View

The genocide that wreaked havoc in Rwanda throughout the 1990s brought profound changes in Rwandan society. Traditional customs and prejudices preventing women from participating in many aspects of Rwanda's public life were set aside, and women were able to venture out of the home, take up jobs, and start businesses. They still face discriminatory obstacles, but now many urban Rwandan women are active in the business sector.

The status of Rwandan business itself is undergoing change as well, thanks to government policies and initiatives taken up by Rwandan women. The government has made public commitments to the need to support women-led businesses. Some Rwandan women have been innovative enough to use globalization to their advantage by setting up export-oriented enterprises.

Legal Rights

Rwanda's Constitution provides women equal legal rights. Rwandan women gained voting rights in 1961. Rwanda's civil laws allow women to own businesses and property; but traditional customary law, which prevails throughout the country, prevents women from actually owning or inheriting property.

Rwandan women receive lesser salaries than the men for performing the same work.

Women in Professions

With more than 80 percent of Rwanda's population living in rural areas, most women work in agriculture. In the formal employment sector, women usually take up clerical jobs, although they have a presence in the judicial, medical, and administrative areas. Although few women run companies in Rwanda, the government is making positive strides by providing training programs and other forms of support to help women start their own businesses.

There are a few famous Rwandan businesswomen. Violette Mutegwamaso, who owns a company that manufactures sorghum-based drinks, is one of them. Beatrice Gakuba, owner of Rwanda Flora, is another. Beatrice's company sells about five tons of flowers per week at Amsterdam's auctions. Donatella Nibagwire founded Floris, a company that exports fruits and vegetables to Brussels and is now eyeing other European markets.

The outlook for the growth of women-owned businesses in Rwanda is positive, with the government taking steps to ensure that more women are provided opportunities and assistance to start their own businesses. Lack of education among women provides one of the biggest obstacles.

For working mothers, older siblings and female family members or relatives usually assume childcare responsibilities. State-sponsored childcare is not available.

Women as Business Owners

With help from the government and non-governmental organizations, an increasing number of Rwandan women are starting their own businesses. However, agriculture continues to be their mainstay, and most businesses tend to focus on the agricultural sector. For instance, women-owned businesses typically focus on agricultural products, market trading, crafts, flowers, plastic market bags, sorghum harvesting and sorghum-based products, and export of fruits and vegetables.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen will be treated with friendliness and respect, and they will generally not face any problems conducting business in Rwanda.

Rwandans may not publicly express their ideas, especially in the presence of foreigners, for fear their poor English or French-speaking abilities will make them the target of ridicule. Most decisions are made by people sitting at the top of the hierarchical pyramid.

In Rwandan families, chairs are usually reserved for men, with women and children sitting on the floor. Men usually eat first, with women and children following later. Visitors get special treatment and receive the best chairs, food, and drink.

Avoid traveling to rural areas close to Rwanda's borders with Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo, where militant groups are active. Take adequate precautions in case of medical emergencies.

Saudi Arabia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In Saudi Arabia's conservative, male-dominated society, women care for the family and home. They lead circumscribed lives and cannot interact with men who are not close relatives. Although women are frequently treated well within their families, they are limited in how they can move about in public. Many places are restricted to visitors of a single sex. For example, the only ice skating rink in Saudi Arabia is for men only. Women can use public libraries only at designated times. When riding public buses, women must enter from a separate door at the back of the bus and sit in the women-only section. Under Saudi law, married women need the permission of their husbands to leave Saudi Arabia. This holds true regardless of nationality. However, in February 2008, a new regulation took effect requiring Saudi men seeking the mandatory permission from their government to marry a foreign woman to sign a binding document granting irrevocable permission for their foreign-born spouse, and children born to them and that spouse, to travel freely and unhindered in and out of Saudi Arabia. However, women married to Saudi males prior to the effective date of the new regulations still need the permission of their husbands to leave Saudi Arabia, while their children require the permission of their fathers to leave the country.

Although Saudis are class conscious, most are middle or upper middle class. Social standing is of limited importance to Saudi women, because their public activities are so limited. Saudi Arabia is experiencing very gradual changes in attitudes towards women. In 2001, women could get a photo identification card for the first time, but only with the permission of a male relative. Today, every Saudi woman is supposed to have a photo identification card, and if she has a passport, she can get the photo I.D. without permission from a male relative.

Although Saudi women cannot vote or stand for election, a few have managed to be appointed as deputy ministers. Women cannot be licensed to practice law, but some women earn law degrees abroad and work outside Saudi Arabia. Many women are doctors, since only female doctors may treat women. Women commonly own and operate small businesses.

Rural women in Saudi Arabia often live the same way they did 30 years ago. In urban areas, women are able to take advantage of a few more rights and privileges. Shi'ite women face additional discrimination. For example, female Shi'ite teachers cannot become school principals, guidance counselors, or university professors. Discrimination against minorities like Jews, Christians, and Hindus is also common.

As far as appearance, Saudi women must wear outer garments that cover their hair, face, and entire bodies. Many Saudi women wear gloves and heavy black socks or closed-toe shoes so that no part of them is visible. Foreign women visiting Saudi Arabia are encouraged to cover their hair, and it is recommended, though usually not required, that they wear an *abaya* as well.

Legal Rights

Saudi Arabia's Basic Law does not refer to women or gender equality. There is no personal status code, so *Sharia* laws are enforced and Muslim scholars are often responsible for making laws. Discrimination against women is common. In court, a man's testimony is given twice as much weight as a woman's.

Women were prevented from voting in 2005, when the first municipal elections were held. Furthermore, women cannot drive and can be arrested for being in a car with a man who is not a relative or an employee. Saudi women can legally inherit half the property male relatives receive. Women can own land or businesses in their own names.

Abortion is allowed to save the pregnant woman's life or to safeguard her physical or mental health. Written approval from the woman and her husband or guardian and the consent of three physicians are necessary for a legal abortion in a government hospital.

When it comes to the dissolution of marriage, a Saudi man can divorce his wife simply by saying, "I divorce you" three times. While a woman may also seek divorce, she must have clear legal grounds, go to court to prove her case, and she must usually persuade a male relative to speak for her in court. Custody of sons over seven years of age and daughters over nine goes to the fathers. Younger children stay with their mothers.

Education

Saudi women only have access to female-only schools, and, until 2002, the Department of Religious Guidance rather than by the Ministry of Education regulated all girls' schools, including universities. The educational system was designed to prepare girls to be wives, mothers, and possibly to become teachers, doctors, or enter other professions considered appropriate for females. In spite of that, women's literacy has improved from two percent in 1970 to over 70 percent in 2003, when about 85 percent of men were literate.

Despite having access to school, female students do not receive the same quality of education as their male counterparts. Male professors or lecturers can only teach girls through videophone connections, and women are prevented from studying subjects like engineering, architecture, or journalism. Although women who study overseas must bring a male relative to chaperone them, this rule is not strictly enforced, and women who can afford to study abroad sometimes choose what in Saudi Arabia are male-dominated fields. Interestingly, more women than men attend Saudi universities.

Gender segregation has limited women to professions where they have no competition from men. Women who study to be doctors or teachers can practice in their field, caring for or teaching only females. Women in other professions have very limited opportunities. In hospitals and the energy industry, men and women sometimes work together, but in other sectors, women must communicate with male supervisors by telephone or fax. Women make up only about seven percent of the Saudi workforce.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Because dating as it is known to Westerners does not occur, Saudi families arrange marriages for their children. Traditionally, patrilineal cousins intermarry, and the bride and groom do not meet each other until the wedding night. Nowadays, matchmakers are sometimes used, and couples may meet briefly under supervision before the wedding. Forced marriages were banned in 2005, however restrictions still apply. Women may marry non-Saudi men only with government permission, and they can't marry non-Muslims. Conversely, men can sometimes marry non-Saudis without government permission, and they may marry Jews, Christians, or Muslims. The median age for marriage was just over 21 for women and about 25 for men in 2005, and women retain their maiden names after marriage.

Sharia law allows polygamy if the husband can provide equally for each wife. Although polygamy is socially acceptable, it is declining because of the high cost of marrying and maintaining additional wives. A woman also has the right to restrict her husband from taking additional wives through a prenuptial agreement.

In terms of property, Saudi women can legally hold assets separately from their husbands. Around 32 percent of Saudi wives hold some property without their husbands' knowledge. In Saudi Arabia, women are traditionally responsible for household activities and caring for children, while men must provide for the financial well being of the family. A huge social stigma is attached to childlessness, which can ultimately lead to divorce or polygamy.

A divorced woman in Saudi Arabia either remarries or returns to her family. When men initiate divorces, they have to pay the one-time alimony specified in the marriage contract. Usually, women have custody of boys until they turn seven and girls until they turn nine, after which the children go to their fathers.

Health

Most women in Saudi Arabia can't make their own healthcare decisions and must consult husbands or close male relatives for approval. A Saudi woman needs permission from a male relative to be admitted to a hospital for medical treatment. Although this rule is not always enforced, it can place serious restrictions on women's access to health care.

Only about 32 percent of married women of childbearing age use contraceptives, and the average woman has about four children. The good news is that 91 percent of births are attended by a skilled healthcare professional. As further positive news for women and their offspring, the infant mortality rate decreased from 21 per 1000 in 1990 to almost half that figure in 2005. The latest maternal mortality figure is 23 per 100,000.

Interesting Social Customs

Gender segregation occurs in all public places, including museums, amusement parks, public beaches and pools, where visiting hours are often separate for men, women, and men with families. Most restaurants have separate dining halls for women and men, and curtained booths for families dining out together. Schools and hospitals employing both sexes also have different working hours for men and women.

Women in Business

General View

The male-dominated Islamic society of Saudi Arabia prescribes very specific roles for women. The culture does not approve of women working outside the home with men unrelated to them, so female participation is only 15.5 percent of the total work force.

Some small changes are, however, underway. More importance is being given to girls' education, and women are now allowed to take photos for identity cards (with the consent of male family members). The state has also allowed businesswomen to take part in the elections held in Jeddah's Trade and Industry Chamber, signifying another small change in the status and role of women in the business world.

Legal Rights

Saudi Arabia's legal system is based on the Shari'a law (Islamic legal code). The state did not allow women to vote or stand for elections in the country's first local elections in 2005. Now Saudi Arabia is the only Gulf state that prohibits women from voting and running for office. Saudi women are allowed to drive cars only if accompanied by a male chaperone.

According to Islamic inheritance laws, daughters and wives inherit a portion of property and have full authority over the inherited property. Women can own property in their names and invest their money in business.

Saudi Arabia's working women are given equal pay for equal work in any profession alongside men. However, the ratio of estimated female to male per capita income is just 21 percent, because of the small number of women employed full time.

Women in Professions

Strong gender discrimination has confined Saudi Arabian women to jobs that require minimal or no contact with men. Women are engaged in hospitals as nurses and doctors caring for women patients, in educational institutions run for girls, charitable activities, and financial services catering to women clients. They also find employment in television and radio programming, computer and library work, and in the Ministry for Post, Telecommunications, and Telegraphs.

Although gender segregation tends to exclude Saudi businesswomen from decision-making and top managerial posts, a few Saudi women have become business owners and executives, including Lubna Al Olayan, CEO of Olayan Financing Company, a multinational enterprise; Lama Al-Sulaiman, the managing partner of Chamelle Health Club and Spa for Ladies and president of the Khadija bint Khouaylid Center for Business Women; and Dr. Nahed Taher, CEO of Gulf One Investment Bank and the first female Saudi head of a bank.

The growth outlook for Saudi women in business is encouraging, with two women winning seats in the Jeddah Trade and Industry Chamber and many women rising to the government position of deputy minister. Saudi women are, however, generally prohibited from becoming engineers, chartered accountants, lawyers, flight attendants, and waitresses.

All Saudi women dress conservatively in the traditional *abaya* (black cloak), which covers them from head to toe, and veil.

In Saudi Arabia, working mothers use the help of extended family members, imported maids from Indonesia, or day-care centers for childcare.

Women as Business Owners

According to regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry, female participation in businesses is steadily growing. Women's right over their inheritances and property supports their entrepreneurial activities, which now number 22,000.. Saudi women mainly invest in small-scale businesses in the service sector. The Ladies Kingdom set up in the second floor of Al Mamlaka Shopping Mall by Prince Waleed bin Talal has offered women opportunities to start businesses in this "one-stop shopping" area for women.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although Saudis do not recognize the participation of their women in the conventional business world, they welcome foreign businesswomen who are modest and discreet. Foreign businesswomen should dress conservatively in loose-fitting clothes, and are legally prohibited from wearing revealing clothes like skirts and sleeveless blouses.

Normally Saudis do not invite women for business lunches or dinners. If this should happen, however, adhere to the dining manners of the country by handling food only with your right hand.

As laws prohibit women from driving and traveling with unknown men, foreign women should hire a taxi or arrange private drivers and should sit in the back seat of the car.

Senegal

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The Islamic state of Senegal has always relegated women to subservient roles in society, and traditional attitudes have prevented women from achieving an equal status with men. However, Senegalese women have the same legal rights as men, and the government is actively working to improve their status.

Senegal has a typically patriarchal society in which women are the homemakers and men are the heads of the household. However, the economic problems of the country have compelled women to take up jobs in the informal sector at an early age, with many young girls quitting schools to financially support their families.

Social norms prevail over legislation, and girls and women in general experience discriminated in education, inheritance, marriage, and pay. Upper-class women have an edge over their lower-class counterparts with regard to education and job opportunities. Urban women also have a relatively better status in society. In rural areas, traditional Islamic practices are strictly followed and women have no equal rights or status with men.

Senegal has recently witnessed some improvement in the status of women through the growth of their small-scale agricultural businesses and other entrepreneurial activities like trading and the production of handicrafts.

Female representation in politics is limited with 19 percent of seats in the lower house of Parliament. They are also marginalized in the legal profession, where women comprise only 14 percent of lawyers. However, Senegalese women have made considerable progress in the fields of teaching, medicine, and the civil service.

The Diolas women of Casamance are considered the priestesses and guardians of society and have a superior status. They provided spiritual, material, and logistical support to men during the 20-year conflict and were at the forefront in peacemaking.

Traditional Senegalese women wear pagnes (long skirts) and loose shirts, often with a headscarf. Modern Senegalese women usually wear Western outfits.

Legal Rights

The Senegalese Constitution guarantees equal rights to men and women. However, pervasive traditional practices inhibit the implementation of these provisions. Women have the right to vote and to run for elected office (since 1945) and the right to drive cars. In most parts of Senegal, however, inheritance practices follow Islamic Sharia laws, which discriminate against women, and women are rarely allowed to own assets or inherit property from their fathers or husbands.

Legislation prohibits abortion except when the pregnancy endangers the life of the mother. The termination of pregnancy requires the medical certification of two physicians. Women can initiate divorce proceedings on the grounds of adultery, desertion, incompatibility, non-support, infertility, and any incurable diseases detected after marriage.

Generally, courts decide the custody of the children, considering the best interests of the child. Although either of the parents may receive the custody of children, fathers remain the legal guardians.

Education

The government offers equal educational opportunities for men and women, but social norms prevent many women from pursuing their education. The Senegalese women's literacy rate is a mere 29 percent compared to the men's rate of 51 percent. While more affluent and more urban girls generally continue their education in secondary school, rural girls generally drop out after primary education due to family obligations.

Senegalese women have less access to jobs than men with the same educational level. Generally, working women earn equal pay for equal work, but they pay higher taxes than men and do not receive child allowances (which are only given to men).

Dating, Marriage and Family

According to Senegalese law, women have the freedom to choose their partners. However in rural areas, parents arrange marriages with or without the consent of the girls, even for widows and divorced women. Senegalese culture does not approve of Western-style dating. Senegalese tend to go out in groups or in couples with a chaperone.

The legal minimum marriage age for women is 16 and 21 for men. The median marriage age is 20 years for women and 29 years for men. Family law permits polygamous marriages with the consent of the first wife. Women only have the right to use the land of their husbands and cannot own, buy, or sell any property.

Senegalese women can legally retain their maiden names, but usually they add their husband's name after marriage. Women are solely responsible for all household chores while men hold the role of head of the family. Childless women feel disadvantaged in society since a lot of importance is given to fertility in Senegal.

When a husband seeks divorce on grounds of incompatibility or incurable disease of the wife, he is liable to pay alimony, but when a divorce is granted solely based on the fault of one person, the court directs the other person to pay compensation. The court may establish the custody of children either jointly or individually, keeping in view the best interests of the child's growth and education.

Health

Senegalese women have unequal access to the healthcare system. Illiteracy, poor accessibility, and the mediocre health care system of Senegal has resulted in high maternal and infant mortality rates of around 690 deaths per 100,000 live births and 78 deaths per 1,000 live births, respectively.

Most of the births in Senegal take place in homes under the guidance of older women who act as midwives. Most women do not have much knowledge about family planning techniques and rely on the advice of older women on health care decisions rather than their husbands. Contraceptive usage is low due to poor availability.

Interesting Social Custom

Senegalese regard female genital mutilation as a social custom and celebrate it. A girl is eligible for marriage only after the "circumcision" and society views women who refuse circumcision as outcasts.

Women in Business

General View

Senegalese women are primarily involved in family and household activities and working on their family farms, although their participation in a wider range of economic activities throughout the country is steadily growing. About 20 percent of Senegalese women are involved in formal paid employment, and those who work outside the home in the informal sector are mostly involved in small-scale agriculture, handicraft production, and trading activities.

Strong Islamic traditions have inhibited women's access to equal education, health care, and employment. However, with the efforts of women's organizations, legal progress, and a slow but steady change in the attitude of men,

Senegalese women now have a comparatively better status in society than they have had in the past.

Legal Rights

Senegal gave women the right to vote and stand for elections in 1945. The Senegalese constitution guarantees equal rights to women in all areas of life, but cultural and traditional practices prevent women from exercising their rights. Legal rights concerning the inheritance of property, for instance, are completely overshadowed by traditional practices wherein women cannot inherit property from their fathers or husbands or own, buy, or sell property on their own.

Recent legislation has increased the penalties for domestic violence (a pervasive problem) and introduced sexual harassment as a crime, but gender-related crimes are rarely prosecuted, or they result in conviction. Generally, urban working women earn equal pay for equal work, but, because they are not legally considered the heads of their households, they pay higher taxes than the men and are not paid the child allowances granted to male workers with families.

Women in Professions

Typically, Senegalese women have a significant presence in agricultural activities and fishing. They are also involved in the informal sector as traders or manufacturers of agricultural products and handicrafts.

Progress in professional areas has been slow for women, but approximately 22 percent of teachers and 14 percent of lawyers are now women. A woman was also appointed as the police chief of Dakar for the first time in 2005. Despite their growing presence in business, administration, academics, law, and teaching, women rarely, if ever, hold the top positions in the organizations for which they work.

A couple of notable well-known women in Senegal include: Binta Sarr, the founder of APROFES, the association for the advancement of Senegalese women whose organization trains rural women to take up leadership roles; Marieme Wane Ly, who formed and headed a political party in Senegal for the first time; and Haw Sy, the first female taxi driver in Senegal and a role model for women interested in working outside their homes.

Traditional practices and widespread illiteracy have relegated women to low-paid jobs in the informal sector, but this situation is changing as more NGOs and women's organizations work for the empowerment of women in the country. Senegalese women are legally prohibited from working at nights and performing hazardous jobs.

There is no specific dress code restriction for professional Senegalese women. Women's attire usually covers most of their body and includes *pagnes* (long skirts) with loose shirts. In urban areas, women also wear Western outfits. Mothers serve as the primary care providers for their children, and working women depend on their extended family or neighbors to help them with childcare. The state runs nursery schools, and the private sector runs many daycare centers for children.

Women as Business Owners

Many Senegalese women are active entrepreneurs. Those who run large businesses engage in the manufacture of tie-dye clothes and dresses, poultry farming, cattle fattening, and the production of soft drinks. Women also run small

shops that sell agricultural produce and handicrafts. Since women typically have no land or property, they usually start small-scale businesses with their own small personal savings. Inadequate management training and start-up capital makes self-employment or the growth of a larger business difficult for Senegalese women.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although Senegal has a male-dominated culture, locals usually treat foreign businesswomen with respect. Business meetings are formal and typically extend

beyond their original schedule. Always start a meeting with a small talk on general topics to establish a good rapport with your business counterparts. Business appointments should not be scheduled during the five prayer times in a day or in the month of Ramadan.

Foreign businesswomen should dress modestly and behave politely. Senegalese men usually do not shake hands with women out of deference. Women should not smoke, as Senegalese consider it rude. Foreign women should also take precautionary safety measures, as crime is common in Senegal.

Serbia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The Serbian adage, "In the life of every successful woman there is at least one man who tried to stop her," illustrates the impediments faced by women, such as male chauvinism and traditional prejudices. Traditional Serbian society has always considered women subordinate to men and confined them to performing domestic chores and rearing children.

Serbian women obtained maximum equality with men during the Communist period under the leadership of Josip Tito. However, the economic crisis of 1990s reversed many of the gains Serbian women had made under Communism. Today, women are making gradual progress towards equality.

Discrimination affects all women in Serbia, regardless of their socio-economic class. High rates of unemployment have forced many women to take up menial jobs in the informal sector. Although women have made progress in almost all fields, their representation in many arenas remains poor because of economic constraints and cultural traditions.

Women occupy about 11 percent of the seats in the Serbian Parliament. In the judiciary, women constitute nearly 56 percent of all judges, 40 percent of prosecutors, and 36.8 percent of Supreme Court judges. Serbian women are increasingly active in the medical field, with increasing numbers working as nurses but few as doctors. In the business sector, the participation of women is low, but rising slowly.

In rural areas, girls are frequently forced to marry at an early age and rarely take part in community development or planning. Urban women have better access to education and employment opportunities, possess more freedom and are more aware of their rights. Social benefits, however, are spread equally between rural and urban women.

Roma women are particularly vulnerable to both racial and gender discrimination. They commonly work as house cleaners or cooks and are often exploited by employers.

Serbian women generally wear western outfits, though rural women sometimes prefer traditional long skirts. There are no particular dress code restrictions.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia guarantees women equal rights to the men in all respects. However, the law is simply a statement of equality. There are few regulations in place that help women to be equal, and the laws concerning equality are not enforced.

Women have the right to vote and drive. The law allows women to exercise full rights over property owned prior to their marriage. Moreover, both spouses have equal rights over the property acquired after marriage, which becomes a joint estate.

Serbia's laws permit abortions through the tenth week of pregnancy. The law further mandates the performance of abortions in a hospital or other authorized health-care facility and requires the consent of the parents or guardians in the case of minors.

Serbian women have the right to initiate divorce. In most divorce cases, courts award the woman custody of the children. Serbia's laws require the non-custodial parent to pay alimony.

Education

Serbian women have fairly good access to education. The state has made nine years of primary schooling mandatory for boys and girls between the ages of seven and fifteen. All the public schools, both primary and secondary schools, provide free education to boys and girls in the same classroom space. Though women have a good literacy rate of 94.1 percent, they lag behind men, whose literacy level stands at 98.9 percent.

Primary school enrollment is very high for girls, who often go on to complete their secondary and tertiary education. Serbian women constitute nearly 56 percent of the total number of University graduates. Despite their high education levels, women do not enjoy the same job opportunities as men. Although women are frequently employed outside the home, they usually occupy lower-level positions than men with similar backgrounds and education.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Generally, Serbian women have the liberty to choose their own partners. Dating is common, and most Serbian women begin dating in their teens. Women usually meet men at social gatherings, parks, restaurants and discos.

Though a few Serbian women marry when they are as young as 16, most of them wait until they finish their education. The average age for Serbian women to marry is about 26.4 years. Though Serbian women have the freedom to retain their maiden name or choose either of their surnames as a common surname, most married women tend to add their husband's surname to their own.

The inherent machismo culture views men as heads of the family and women as homemakers and caregivers. Serbian society expects women to marry and have children; childless women often endure the social stigma attached to infertility.

Serbian women have legal rights to own, buy or sell property without their consent of their husbands.

According to the law of Marriage and Family Relations, the services of women working in the home should be taken into account when separating the property at the time of divorce. Usually women receive custody of the children and men have to pay 50 percent of their salary for child support.

Serbian laws prohibit polygamy.

Health

Although Serbian women have equal legal access to healthcare services, their economic conditions restrict such access. Many women do not have health insurance coverage.

Still, studies indicate that almost 96 percent of all births in Serbia take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. This is reflected in the low maternal mortality rate of 9.5 deaths per 100,000 live births. The infant mortality rate stands at 10.7 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Serbian women have legal rights to make their own health decisions.

Mediocre maternal health care, traditional beliefs, and a consistently poor supply of birth control devices have kept contraceptive use low among Serbian women.

Interesting Social Customs

Serbian wedding celebrations go on for days. As part of the ceremony, the bride should stand in the doorway of her new home and lift a baby boy three times before entering the house. Serbians believe that this practice blesses a couple with children.

Women in Business

General View

Traditional Serbian culture restricted women to domestic work. Nowadays, however, Serbian women are well educated, work outside the home, and constitute nearly 42 percent of the total workforce in Serbia, occupying jobs primarily in the public, trade, commerce, and social welfare sectors.

The economic crisis of the country during its transition period has altered the traditional roles of women as homemakers and caregivers. Although Serbian women are increasingly occupying positions of power, conventional cultural practices are still discriminatory and continue to marginalize them in various ways.

Legal Rights

The Serbian constitution guarantees women equal rights in all areas of life. They have had the right to vote and stand for elections since 1946. Women have full rights over any property held before marriage. Property obtained after marriage becomes a joint estate, and both spouses have equal rights over the assets. The rate of domestic violence is high in Serbia, but few victims of spousal abuse ever file complaints with authorities.

According to the Serbian labor law, all employees have the right to earn equal pay for equal work. In reality, however, women earn less than men, and the gap in the wage disparity becomes wider as one goes up the corporate ladder. Women in Serbia are still technically granted maternity leave for one year, but the law is open to some interpretation (e.g., coverage for unmarried mothers) and could be weakened in any rewritten Serbian constitution.

Women in Professions

Serbian women predominantly work as teachers in primary schools or take up employment in health services, textile and food industries, the trade and catering sector, and the civil service. They also play a significant role in the cultural and social welfare sectors. Overall, women hold 42 percent of all public sector jobs and 41 percent of all (generally higher paying) private sector jobs. Women's unemployment rate is slightly higher than that of men. Some 60 percent of women involved in work in the informal sector are also formally employed as well, usually so they can obtain health care. Wage differences between men and women hover around 28 percent in the formal sector and about 40 percent in the informal sector.

The prevailing male dominance relegates women to lower-level positions, making it difficult for them to hold high-level managerial posts in companies. On average, women occupy only 25 percent of all senior management positions. Some notable examples of successful Serbian businesswomen are: Borka Vucic, who wrote the book "Banking: Choice or Destiny" and served as president of Beograd Bank, the largest bank in Serbia; Svetlana Milicic-Teovanovic owner of the P.A. Club real estate agency; Dragijana Radonjic-Petrovic, the owner and managing director of MandV Investments, a leading brokerage company; Olivera Popovic, who owns PStech Beograd, which provides IT and automation systems.

The overall emancipation of Serbian women has resulted in a large number of women undertaking jobs in male-dominated fields and entrepreneurship, but Serbia's labor laws still prohibit women from working in jobs that involve difficult physical toil, underground or underwater work, or which pose threats to their health and life. However, there are no dress code restrictions that prevent Serbian women from taking up certain jobs.

Working mother usually entrust childcare to the members of the extended family, and godparents. Some use daycare centers. The childcare facilities launched during the Communist era are generally run under poor conditions and have limited availability.

Women as Business Owners

Most Serbian women prefer to start businesses that have female customers. Statistics indicate that about 40 percent of all enterprise owners are women. Female-run businesses usually deal with textiles, clothing, cosmetics

and home products, baking, dairy products, art and design, marketing services, and the production of canned goods.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Serbia's business culture is similar to that of most European countries, and Serbians tend to treat foreign businesswomen cordially. Foreign businesswomen should dress discreetly and wear elegant suits or dresses. Make

appointments in advance, and avoid scheduling meetings in the months of July and August or on national holidays. Business negotiations usually take a long time. In Serbia, foreign visitors should shake hands with everyone in the meeting, beginning with the women. Serbia prohibits people from taking photographs of military and police installations in their country, so be careful about taking photographs. Also avoid political discussions.

Sierra Leone

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women in Sierra Leone face discrimination across the board. They do not have adequate access to education, employment, or healthcare. Sierra Leone is a male-dominated society, and prejudices against women are common, despite Constitutional assurances to the contrary.

Young Sierra Leonean girls learn to be good mothers and wives. Women take care of the household, rear children, farm if they live in rural areas, or start micro-businesses if they live in cities. Women from upper-class families are likely to have access to education, employment, and other facilities. Wealthy women are also better equipped to safeguard their own rights, as legal fees prevent many poor women from accessing the courts of law.

The status of Sierra Leonean women is slowly changing. Traditionally, women had little representation in Sierra Leone's public life. Today, the country's civil service employs increasing numbers of women.

Sierra Leonean women hold 14.5 percent of the seats in Parliament and 10 percent of ministerial positions. On the high court, four of seven judges are women, while on the court of appeal, half of the six judges are women. Growing numbers of women work as lawyers. Many Sierra Leonean women are nurses, but few become doctors. Women continue work in traditional roles as proprietors of very small businesses, but female executives are almost unheard of.

Civil law usually applies to urban women, so they own property and their rights are legally protected. Rural women are likely to be governed by customary tribal law, which is almost always discriminatory. They work in subsistence-level agriculture and live hard lives, with little money and unequal access to land.

Sierra Leone has many ethnic groups, and the role of women in each of these tribes differs. For example, women of the Temne and Limba tribes have some property rights, but cannot become paramount chiefs. The Mende tribe, on the other hand, has a number of female paramount chiefs.

There are no dress code restrictions, though women usually dress conservatively. Most Muslim women in Sierra Leone do not wear veils.

Legal Rights

Sierra Leone's Constitution provides equal legal right to women, but recognizes the role of customary laws in marriage, divorce, adoption, property rights, and other areas. Because of this, customary law is often followed

and discrimination against women remains common. Many people do not understand the division of authority between local chiefs and the formal justice system's local courts, and this usually puts women at a disadvantage. Chiefs commonly settle matters that should be decided in court, and their rulings follow customary law, which does not usually protect women's rights.

Sierra Leonean women received the right to vote in 1961. The Constitution grants women the right to own and inherit property, but according to customary law, all inheritance passes through the male line. Because of this, few women outside of the capital own property or will even attempt to claim an inheritance. Women from some tribes cannot go to local courts at all, but must send a male guardian to represent them.

Abortion is legal only if it's needed to save a woman's life, physical health, or mental health. Civil and customary laws allow women to initiate divorce, but it is easier for men to get a divorce. Under customary law, men can get a divorce without cause, while women must have a compelling reason when asking for a divorce. All divorce proceedings are costly, and few women have enough money to get a divorce.

A majority of the population is Muslim, and their religious laws grant custody of boys to their mothers until they reach the age of nine and girls until they come of age. When custody is decided in civil court, mothers stand a good chance of retaining custody of their children.

Education

Access to education in Sierra Leone is poor overall, but fewer girls than boys go to school. Chronic poverty keeps education low on the list of priorities, and families often keep children, especially girls, home to help with housework like gathering wood and fetching water. Many schools charge a fee, which few families can afford to pay. In cases where a family can afford to send only one or two children to school, they normally choose to send boys rather than girls. Early marriage also contributes to girls' poor attendance. The 2004 literacy rates reflect this—21 percent of women could read, compared to 40 percent of men.

In 2004, 39 percent of girls attended primary school, and only 12 percent went on to secondary school. Very few women go to college or university, where students are overwhelmingly male.

Sierra Leone's few educated women find it difficult to obtain well-paying professional jobs. Women are 40 percent of the workforce in the clerical sector, but hold only 8 percent of the managerial and administrative posts. Many women become civil servants.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages are traditional in Sierra Leone and are still common, especially outside the capital, where families often arrange marriages while their children are very young. The bride's consent is not considered necessary. The practice of men and women choosing their own spouses is gaining popularity, especially among educated youth. Some dating does occur among young, educated people, but it remains unusual. In urban areas, young people may meet at school or through friends or family.

Sierra Leone's civil laws do not specify a legal marriageable age for girls. Customary law governs most marriages, so a girl is of age once she reaches puberty, and girls sometimes marry as early as 12 or 13. Most women, however, marry in their early twenties. Sierra Leonean women do not take their husband's names after marriage.

Polygamy is commonly practiced and accepted in Sierra Leone, especially in rural areas. Under Muslim religious law, a man can take up to four wives. Non-Muslim men may take as many wives as they please. In either case, the first wife has seniority over the other wives, and the wife with the most children always has high status. Most urban and Christian marriages are monogamous.

In most tribes, men make the important household decisions. Some, such as the Sherbro, have female-headed households. Women-led households are becoming more common, the legacy of years of conflict.

In Sierra Leone, getting pregnant with the first child is often considered the formal recognition of a marriage. Childlessness, therefore, carries a heavy stigma for a woman, and can cause divorce or polygyny.

Under customary law, a woman's family has to refund the dowry in the event of a divorce. The wife can only keep the property she had prior to marriage, and is not entitled to a share of property acquired after marriage. Under Muslim customary law, mothers are granted custody of the children until the boys reach nine years of age and girls reach the age of puberty. For others, child custody is often decided in court, and the mother stands a good chance of receiving custody of her children. Under civil law, women are usually entitled to alimony and child support.

Health

The standards of medical care in Sierra Leone are poor. In Freetown, there is one doctor for every 20,500 people, while the Koinadugu district has a single qualified medical practitioner for 226,100 people. Men and women generally have the same access to health care.

The maternal mortality rate for 2004 was 1,800 deaths per 100,000 live births, one of the highest in the world, with 80 percent of all deliveries taking place at home. Infant mortality rates for 2006 are estimated at 160 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Sierra Leonean women rarely make their own healthcare decisions. Tradition and chronic poverty leave them dependent on men. The use of contraceptives is limited due to customary prejudices, lack of awareness, and poverty. The government has taken steps to increase awareness, but the average woman still has about six children.

Interesting Social Customs

Many girls in Sierra Leone are initiated into the Bondo, a women's secret society, before marriage. Bondo (also called Sande) rituals are meant to educate young women about

marriage and prepare them for adult life. Circumcision, often called female genital mutilation, is also a part of the initiation. The majority of Sierra Leonean women—some estimate up to 90 percent—go through the initiation rituals.

Women in Business

General View

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world, and the women bear the brunt this chronic poverty's effects. Their access to education is severely limited and this, in turn, limits their participation in the country's economy. Traditional customs and prejudices that assert the inferiority of women further discourage them from taking up jobs or starting businesses.

The civil war that raged through the 1990s had a major impact on Sierra Leonean women, with most of them now engaged in rebuilding their lives in its aftermath. There are a few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide loans and credit for women to start their own businesses, since getting credit from government institutions is almost impossible for women. This has allowed more women to venture out to provide financial support for their families.

Legal Rights

The Constitution provides women with equal legal rights in all respects, although it co-exists with and recognizes traditional customary laws, which are discriminatory towards women. Sierra Leone's women were granted voting rights in 1961. A woman's right to own businesses and property usually depends on the ethnic group to which she belongs, although customary law generally prohibits women from inheriting and owning property.

Pay disparities are severe in Sierra Leone, with women earning less than half of men's earnings for the same job.

Women in Professions

Most Sierra Leonean women work in the agricultural sector, often running small or micro-sized businesses that deal with agricultural products, crafts, and basic goods. Women also constitute a significant portion of Sierra Leone's civil service. A few work in the private sector.

Most women are unable to rise up the corporate ladder due to discrimination and a lack of opportunities, so there are very few female heads of companies in Sierra Leone. One famous female head of a company is Lilian A. Lisk, the owner of a food processing company called Intrapex (SL) Ltd., former managing director of Okey Agencies Ltd., and executive director of Apex Fishing Company. Another is Abie Aruna, who is the managing director of Monza Fishing Company and the owner of other businesses in the transport and restaurant sectors.

The outlook for Sierra Leone's women in business is discouraging due to chronic poverty, discriminatory practices, lack of opportunities, and very limited access to education. However, various women's groups and NGOs have come forward to help Sierra Leonean women set up their own businesses by providing them with loans and credit.

Sierra Leonean women are not barred from any professions, except those that involve forced labor. A few state-sponsored childcare facilities are available in Sierra Leone, but family members, relatives, and friends in the community usually take care of the children of working mothers.

Women as Business Owners

An increasing number of Sierra Leonean women are setting up their own businesses by taking advantage of the opportunities in various sectors, such as fishing, that are slowly opening up. Women-owned businesses typically focus on the agricultural and fishing sectors, garment production, tie dyeing, and selling crafts and primary goods. Some women have also set up businesses that take advantage of natural resources abundant in their areas.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Although Sierra Leone is a male-dominated society, local businessmen will be more than willing to do business with foreign businesswomen and will treat them with respect.

Sierra Leonean people give importance to greetings, which are usually eloquent. Businesspeople generally exchange cards when meeting. Business meetings are usually quite formal, with social gatherings a lot less so.

Sierra Leone's citizens are very polite and well mannered, with great importance given to dressing neatly. Visitors must be sensitive to local customs, especially in the rural areas.

When dining at a Sierra Leonean household, politeness requires leaving some food on the plate, while repeatedly thanking the hosts for their generosity.

Singapore

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditionally, Singapore has had a patriarchal society where men were dominant. The culture expected women to give priority to children and family as they participated in the economy alongside men. Over the last two decades, however, Singapore has witnessed a remarkable emancipation of women. During this period, a large number of women began to play a broader role in the social, economic, and political life of the country, and the meritocratic government of Singapore has made significant progress in eliminating gender disparity across all socio-economic classes and ethnic groups.

Female educational level, economic status, and social participation are growing in the country, and women are increasingly treated on equal terms with men in all spheres. This has helped to raise women's economic activity rate to 50 percent and to lower the pay gap between women and men to 38 percent.

Women's representation in Singapore's politics is increasing, and a few hold high political posts like MP, Minister of State, and District Mayor. Twenty percent of members of Parliament and 22 percent of nominated members of Parliament were women. Women also comprised 55 percent of civil employees in the Singaporean government.

Women have adequate representation in the judiciary, with three Supreme Court justices, two High Court Judges, and 44 percent of Subordinate Court judgeships. There was also a woman commander in charge of a police division.

Many women have started their own businesses and are becoming successful entrepreneurs. However, women are under-represented in medicine, as the Singaporean medical colleges and universities used to limit the number of seats for women (in the belief that women would forego their profession for family reasons). The government has recently lifted this ban and expects to see more female doctors and medical staff.

Several ethnic groups coexist harmoniously in Singapore. The government has taken several steps to promote

racial harmony and women's liberation, including a ban on Muslim women's wearing the *tudung* (head scarf). However, female migrant laborers from countries like Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, and Thailand often face discrimination and economic difficulties in Singapore.

There is no specific dress code for women in Singapore. Women generally wear casual, yet modest European-style clothing or traditional Indian, Chinese, or Malay dresses for social occasions.

Legal Rights

The Singaporean Constitution offers equal civil and political rights to its men and women. The Women's Charter, passed in 1961, protects women's rights and guarantees them equality in various sectors of life.

Singaporean women have had the right to vote (which is mandatory) and to run for elected office since 1947. Women also have the right to own and inherit property, although certain disadvantages exist for Muslim women.

The law permits women to obtain abortions in Singapore, and the government provides mandatory pre-abortion counseling for women who have at least a secondary school education and fewer than three children.

Singaporean women also have the right to initiate divorce proceedings. Both parents have equal rights over the custody of children.

Education

Singapore provides equal access to education to women and men, along with six years of free and compulsory primary education in national schools. Boys and girls share the same classroom space in Singapore's schools and colleges.

In 2003, women's literacy rate was 89 percent, compared to men's rate of 97 percent. A growing number of Singaporean women are obtaining polytechnic qualifications and university degrees.

Singaporean women and men enjoy equal employment opportunities in all sectors, but female representation among top managerial positions is low.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Most Singaporean women choose their own partners, and interracial marriages are not uncommon. However, traditional Indian and Malay families still maintain the practice of arranging marriages.

Dating is allowed in Singapore, and young people usually meet in professional and social settings. The government is promoting personal and online dating agencies to help women and men find suitable marriage partners, so they will contribute to the nation's population growth.

The legal age for marriage is 21 years, but the median age at which women first marry has increased from 26 in 1990 to 27 in 2003, compared to men's figures of 29 and 30, respectively. Minors between 18 and 21 can marry with either their parents' or legal guardian's written approval, and minors under 18 have to get a license from the Ministry of Community Development. Generally, women retain their maiden names after marriage.

Traditionally, women are considered the homemakers and men the family heads. Among educated modern couples, the rights and responsibilities of the households are mostly shared equally. Singaporean women have the right to hold assets separate from their husbands.

Although monogamous marriages are the norm in Singapore, Malay Muslims can have polygamous marriages.

The birth rate is generally very low in Singapore, and childlessness in women doesn't carry much social stigma.

Women can apply for maintenance and custody of a child after filing for a divorce. The court grants the custody of children to either of the parents or to a relative on the basis of the child's best interests.

Health

Singaporean women have equal access to the country's comprehensive healthcare system, which encompasses a number of private and public clinics and hospitals offering modern medical aid, excellent nutrition programs, maternal and infant care, and family planning services. The country's average maternal mortality rate of six deaths per 100,000 births and its infant mortality rate of three deaths per 1,000 live births are among the lowest in the world.

Women make their own healthcare decisions under the guidance of doctors. They have to undergo compulsory counseling before and after an abortion or birth control program. Singaporean women have good access to contraceptives, and the usage rate of contraceptives is high.

Women in Business

General View

Singaporean women are esteemed for their significant role in the nation's economy and are encouraged by the meritocratic society and the government to obtain greater financial independence by working outside the home. Increasing numbers of women are now active as professionals and business owners while they continue to shoulder their household and family responsibilities.

With the establishment of private organizations and women's associations like Singapore Women in Mentoring, Singapore Women in Finance, and Singapore Women in Technology (SWIM, SWIF, and SWIT), Singaporean businesswomen have increased access to

higher education, technology, finance, skills training, and the international market. However, in general, women still face gender disparities and have some distance to go before achieving true equality with men.

Legal Rights

Singaporean women have the legal right to run for office and to vote, which they do at a very high rate. The Women's Charter, enacted in 1961, assures all women the right to run a business and to own and inherit property. However, in reality, social obligations inhibit women, especially Muslims, from equal enjoyment of the rights to inheritance and succession.

The law offers women equal employment opportunities, and equal pay for equal work. It is not uncommon these days to find professional women earning more than men in certain jobs, but statistics reveal that, on average, salaried women workers earn only 72 percent of salaried men's compensation.

Women in Professions

Singaporean women are involved in executive, administrative, and clerical jobs, mostly in lower- and middle-level management positions. Women are also entering male-dominated areas of professional and technical jobs.

Women make up nearly 50 percent of Singapore's labor force, 55 percent of its civil servants, 45 percent of its professional and technical workers, and 26 percent of its administrators and managers. Although men dominate top-level management positions, there are a few successful female business heads and executives in the country.

Some of the most well-known women in Singapore's business world are: Catherine Lam, the founder of Fabristeel, which manufactures steel products for restaurants and hotels across Southeast Asia; Pauline Ong, co-founder of POCL Business Consultancy and the general manager behind Guardian Pharmacy's expansion from one to 55 locations; Jannie Tay, founder of The Hour Glass watch and jewelry store chain; Ho China, executive director of Singapore-based Temasek Holdings; and Lien Siaou-Sze, senior vice-president of Hewlett-Packard Services Asia-Pacific.

The policies of the Singaporean Government and Women's Charter have supported female economic participation, and there is a significant growth rate for women in business.

Singaporean working women usually take the help of relatives for childcare and pay them a nominal salary. Working parents also use the services of the growing number of private and public nurseries, kindergartens, and play schools. The government provides childcare subsidies to mothers who put their children in childcare centers.

Women as Business Owners

According to a government survey, 22 percent of the total entrepreneurs are women, and there are nearly 43,000 women-headed companies in Singapore. Entrepreneurs are usually older women with work experience who start businesses targeted to women customers, like jewelry shops, beauty salons, fashion and dressmaking concerns, and kitchen appliance retailers.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Singapore is an ideal place for foreign women to do business because of the respect given to women entrepreneurs in the country. At initial meetings, businesspeople commonly exchange business cards, along with a soft and formal handshake. Business practices vary slightly among the major ethnic groups (Chinese, Malays, and Indians) in Singapore. Foreign

businesswomen should typically wait for Malay Muslim men to initiate the handshake, while native Singaporeans wait for women to do so. Singaporeans prefer to discuss business over long business lunches.

Foreign businesswomen should wear modest and professional attire, like tailored suits, and avoid revealing garments.

Slovakia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Slovakian society is patriarchal in nature. Slovakian women and girls generally lack access to the country's public life and remain subject to widespread discrimination. While women are still primarily responsible for taking care of their families, the status of Slovakian women is undergoing change, with an increasing number actively participating in various areas of society.

The Slovakian government has initiated a number of reforms to empower women, including education and training programs. Other measures seek to remove existing discriminatory practices. There is equality in the social security system as well as other state-provided benefits, such as health insurance, pensions, and social care. Although Slovakia's legal provisions are designed to encourage women's emancipation, age-old social customs still ensure masculine dominance. Domestic violence, for instance, remains a major problem, with statistics indicating that as many as 40 percent of all Slovakian women experience domestic abuse.

Women's participation in politics is relatively low in Slovakia, with 17 percent of the seats in Slovakia's Parliament held by women and no women in the cabinet. In the judiciary, women hold 30 of the 76 Supreme Court seats, one of the 10 Constitutional Court seats, and 64 percent of the seats in the regional and district courts. The representation of women in Slovakia's business sector is poor, but the medical field has a large number of women who work as nurses and healthcare workers.

One legacy of the Communist era is that there is little disparity between the social or economic classes of people in the country, so most women face the same obstacles regardless of their background. There is some disparity, however, in social status between rural and urban women. Rural women are most often employed in the agricultural or administrative sectors on a full-time basis. Wage levels for these women are lower than men's but higher than those of urban women. Some women even own and manage their own farms independently.

Those belonging to certain ethnic communities, like the Roma, for instance, face abuse, discrimination in healthcare, and discriminatory policies like forced sterilizations. They also have high levels of poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy.

Dress is more or less casual in Slovakia. There are no particular dress code restrictions.

Legal Rights

Slovakia's Constitution grants women all the same rights that men enjoy. Women received the right to vote in 1920. They also can own and manage property.

Abortions are legally permitted in Slovakia and are available subject to the following conditions: there should be a gap of six months between two abortions unless the woman is over 35 years of age or if she had two other births; the procedure must be performed within 12 weeks of pregnancy; abortions in the second trimester are allowed only under medical grounds or if the pregnancy is the result of a sexual crime.

Slovakian women have the right to initiate divorce, and divorced women have the right to claim custody of their children.

Education

There is no discrimination in the availability of education to girls in Slovakia. The adult literacy rate for both women and men is virtually 100 percent. Schools and colleges are coeducational, with men and women sharing the same classrooms.

More women than men finish their primary and secondary levels of education. The ratio of men and women who finish their university education is split 50-50.

Legally, educated Slovakian women have the same access to job opportunities as the men. In practice, however, the situation is quite different. Women routinely suffer discrimination and are often compelled to work in low-paying jobs for which they are over-qualified.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Slovakian women have the freedom to choose their life partners, although they are expected to marry people from the same religious background. Dating is allowed, and practices are similar to other Eastern European countries where youngsters start dating in their mid-teens. Young women usually meet men at educational institutions, the workplace, and at social events.

The legal marriageable age for a Slovakian woman is 18, and the average age at which they marry is about 24. Polygamy is socially and legally unacceptable.

Although men are the titular heads of the household, women are in-charge of the household. Slovakian women can legally hold assets separate from their husbands.

Infertility is considered bad, and childless Slovakian women are stigmatized. However, these attitudes are slowly disappearing, especially in the urban areas.

Women take their husband's name after marriage and add the suffix *-ova* to it. Women can re-assume their maiden name after divorce within one month after the divorce order is finalized.

In the event of a divorce, women can claim a share in the conjugal property. Usually, both parents get joint custody of the children upon divorce and can come to an agreement about custody. When the parents cannot agree, the County Governor's Office or the courts make the final decision.

Health

These days, there is greater health consciousness among women, along with fewer incidences of smoking and drinking. Slovakian women are permitted to make their own healthcare decisions.

Slovakian women have equal access to healthcare services and even have some advantages over men in relation to reproductive healthcare. Slovakia's maternal mortality rate is three deaths for every 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is about seven fatalities for every 1,000 live births.

The use of modern contraceptives is rising, with the development of healthcare facilities and informative materials contributing to increased levels of awareness.

Interesting Social Customs

On Easter morning Slovak men and boys go from door to door with bottles of perfume and whips made of braided willows. They perfume and (gently) whip all the women in the house in a practice believed to make the women more beautiful, healthy, and fertile. For this, the rewards they receive are alcohol for the men and money or chocolate eggs for the boys.

Women in Business

General View

The political, economic, and social transitions after 1989 brought a lot of changes to the lives of Slovakian women, who constitute about 50 percent of the total workforce, but women's jobs remain mostly in the public sector in health, social care, and education. Women are under-represented in private business, where they often face job discrimination. Some 25 percent of all Slovakia's entrepreneurs, however, are women.

Although the government has introduced a number of legislative steps to promote equality among the sexes, implementation and enforcement have been slow. Non-governmental women's organizations and publications in Slovakia have been actively involved in raising gender awareness in society.

Legal Rights

Women have had the right to vote since 1919, and Slovakia's laws provide women with all the same rights as men, including the right to own businesses and own or inherit property. Women are paid 22 percent less than men on average and this disparity widens as employees get older, because men in Slovakia obtain more seniority

and get more discretionary pay in the form of bonuses, supplemental wages, and premiums.

Women in Professions

Traditional jobs for Slovakian women include teaching, clerical work, nursing, sales, teaching, and working in factories. Slovakian women are prohibited from working in jobs that involve the extraction of minerals or underground construction.

Among the prominent business owners and executives in Slovakia are: Klaudia Valuskova, an entrepreneur with interests in insurance, selling, leasing, and restaurants; Daina Tomajkova, head of *Zeleny Dom*, a firm that deals in hotels and catering; Margeta Eichlerova, whose company *Drevonka Martin* manufactures wooden toys; Maria Majerska, owner of *Anex*, a producer of cleaning, washing, and cosmetic products; Ingrid Kaczorekova of *Inwex*; and Tatiana Hebelkova, owner of a small candle production firm.

The government sponsors special child care centers for working mothers. However, their numbers are decreasing due to a lack of funding. Slovakia also has crèches to take care of the young children of working mothers.

Women as Business Owners

Over the last decade, many Slovakian women have been successful in starting small businesses. Women now own 22 percent of single-employee businesses and 20 percent of other businesses. Women-owned businesses mostly focus on the service, retail, and trade sectors. Women are also involved in the garment and food product industries.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen do not experience much difficulty in doing business in Slovakia. Local businessmen usually engage in small talk on topics like one's home country, job, and impressions of Slovakia before getting down to actual business. Avoid topics such as the weather, politics, and salary. Negotiations are usually quick. Business meetings can include a welcome toast that consists of an alcoholic beverage like *slivovica* (plum brandy) or *borovicka* (a drink similar to gin).

Slovaks are not very expressive in public, and they view displays of emotion as inappropriate. Avoid scheduling business meetings in the months of July and August, as these are vacation months for Slovaks.

Slovenia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Men and women are considered equals in Slovenian society. Women were traditionally held responsible for family and domestic activities, while men were expected to be the primary breadwinners of the household, but these days many couples try to share the household responsibilities to balance work and home life.

Traditionally, Slovenia was a patriarchal society. Although women have been emancipated to a high degree since the Second World War, many inequities rooted in gender-biased attitudes still exist for Slovenian women. Slovenian women face discrimination in many spheres, including inequality in pay for equal work with men.

However, for more than half a century now, Slovenia's female economic activity rate has been one of the highest in the world. Women comprise nearly 45 percent of the total labor force, with a large number of them involved in agricultural activities. Many women are entering the academic, health, cultural, and social welfare sectors. Women are also making their presence felt in public services and administration, trading, tourism, and the media

Female participation in government is comparable to men's, with women representing 35 to 55 percent of state under-secretaries, general secretaries, senior advisors, and assistant directors. Women comprise 63 percent of judges in the Slovenian judiciary and four of the nine judges in the Slovenian Constitutional Court. Women are adequately represented in business, although they rarely occupy top managerial positions: women comprised only fourteen, nine, and seven percent of directors in small, medium, and large companies, respectively.

All Slovenian women, irrespective of their ethnic groups or subcultures, have similar roles in society. Rural women, however, suffer the burden of heavy agricultural work along with domestic duties and play an insignificant role in decision-making.

There is no dress code restriction for Slovenian women, who generally dress in Eastern European-style clothing.

Legal Rights

The Slovenian Constitution grants women and men equal political, social, and economic rights. Slovenian women have had the right to vote and to run for elected office since 1945. They also have the right to own and inherit property the same as men.

Women can have an abortion in a hospital under the supervision of a registered physician, gynecologist, or obstetrician. A minor needs the permission of her parents before obtaining an abortion.

Women also have the right to initiate divorces on many grounds, including mutual consent. In about 90 percent of divorce cases, courts granted the custody of children to mothers, compared to mere 6 percent to fathers.

Education

Slovenia offers free, compulsory, coeducational primary education for all children, and an equal proportion of girls and boys attend secondary schools. The adult literacy rate of Slovenian men and women is equal at 100 percent.

Women's educational levels are rapidly improving, and more female students than male students at the college level receive national scholarships (65 percent versus 35 percent).

Although women have access to equal employment opportunities, traditional perceptions often relegate them to certain jobs like clerical work. Women rarely occupy highly paid jobs or decision-making positions.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Women have the freedom to choose their own partners, although traditional arranged marriages (un-coerced) also take place in Slovenia. Girls and boys start dating in their teens, and they usually meet in educational and social settings.

The legal marriageable age is 18 in Slovenia, and the median age at which women first get married is 30 years (33 years for men). Minors below 18 years of age can marry under certain valid reasons with the approval of Center for Social Work. Co-habitation is a growing trend among Slovenians. Polygamy, however, is illegal.

Upon marriage, the couple has the freedom to take either of the spouse's surnames, combine both their surnames, or simply retain their own names. Women can hold property or assets separate from their husbands.

In Slovenia, women are primarily in charge of the household, while men take the role of breadwinners. However, many modern young husbands help their wives in domestic chores and childcare.

In Slovenian society, childlessness in women doesn't appear to have much social stigma attached to it, and there is growing social support for child adoption by infertile couples.

In a divorce, wives typically get alimony, depending on the economic condition of the spouse. Women generally also get custody of their children, unless the mother has unstable health or emotional problems.

Health

Slovenian women and men have equal access to the healthcare system, although privatization has generally limited access to affordable medical facilities. Nevertheless, about 98 percent of pregnant women receive prenatal and postnatal care, including information on personal health and childcare, in various clinics and hospitals. The quality of this care is reflected in the low infant mortality rates of approximately four deaths per 1,000 live births.

Slovenian women can make their own healthcare decisions regarding the number of children and the space between children. Until the beginning of the 1990s, family planning was unpopular and abortion rates were high. The

government introduced several policies and provisions that led to greater availability and acceptability of contraceptives.

Women in Business

General View

Women make up about half of Slovenia's entire labor force, a dramatic increase over previous years. Men are generally considered the main providers in the family, with women responsible for caring for the children and the home. Young couples who work, however, often share their family responsibilities.

Despite the persistence of Slovenia's traditionally patriarchal system, men regard women as equals. Women have established a strong presence in sectors such as culture and social welfare, public service, administration, and the hospitality industry. Their roles in the workplace have undergone a significant change as a result of industrialization and education. However, women are still under-represented in top leadership positions in both the public and private sectors and receive lower pay than men for the same work.

Legal Rights

Slovenia's Constitution grants women equal legal rights in all respects. Women were granted the right to vote in 1945 and they have equal rights in matters of property, inheritance, and business ownership. Statistics indicate that Slovenian women earn approximately 30 percent less than men performing the same job.

Women in Professions

Traditional jobs for Slovenian women are in the health, social care, education, tourism, trade, and financial services sectors. Pregnant women are barred from nighttime jobs and overtime work.

Women are common in leading positions in government, but their numbers are very limited in managerial positions at large businesses. Only 16.5 percent of the incorporated businesses in Slovenia have female managers. An example of a famous Slovenian businesswoman is Marta Turk, an organizer of business services for international exhibitors at fairs and conferences, with her own printing shop and counseling service for fledgling entrepreneurs.

The state assists working women through an extensive network of maternity hospitals, nurseries, and kindergartens. The extended family also helps with childcare. Paid childcare is rare.

Women as Business Owners

The number of women-owned businesses in Slovenia has increased, in part because of the difficulties in succeeding in the private sector. Women-owned businesses tend to focus on non-standard products and services. Their presence is higher in the manufacturing and textile products sector. They also concentrate on wholesaling and retailing. Other popular areas for businesses owned by women include real estate, financial services, data analysis, and construction.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen do not face any problems conducting business in Slovenia. Social and business customs are very similar to those in the rest of Europe.

Slovenians are a bit reserved at initial meetings, but open up after establishing a personal relationship with their business associates. Top management usually makes decisions unilaterally.

At a business meeting, shake hands with everyone present, taking care to start with the women present. Academic and professional titles carry weight, so be sure to use them.

Humor is not common in business settings and may not go down well. Avoid using slang, jargon, or colloquial expressions, and steer clear of discussing politics or religion. Avoid making business appointments in July and August.

Solomon Islands

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The Solomon Islands have a traditionally male-dominated society in which women play a subordinate role with limited opportunities in areas such as education, the economy, social life, or politics. Solomon Islanders expect women to follow the traditional division of gender roles that dictate cleaning, cooking, taking care of the family and children, gathering firewood, and carrying water to be “feminine” jobs.

This traditional perception of women in the Solomon Islands is, however, undergoing gradual change. Various women’s and Christian groups have made women more aware of their rights. Access to education has also provided women with a voice and a different perspective of the world around them. The government, too, is playing its part by bringing in new laws and amending old ones to remove discrimination against women in various areas of Solomon Islands society.

Domestic abuse against the women of Solomon Islands is a problem, however. Domestic violence is especially prevalent in areas where the custom of paying a “bride price” is followed, since this payment effectively makes the woman the property of her husband.

There is not a single woman representative among the 50 members of the National Parliament or in any of the Provincial Assemblies. This underscores the severe under-representation that Solomon Islander women face in politics and public life. Of the 21 permanent secretaries in the Public Service, women occupy only three positions, plus four positions at the undersecretary level.

Women are almost entirely unrepresented in the judiciary and business sectors. The Local Courts of Solomon Islands are usually led by customary law leaders who are little more than village chiefs without any formal legal training. Many Solomon Islander women work as nurses and midwives.

Almost the entire population of the Solomon Islands lives in rural areas where the role of women is governed by traditional customs and beliefs. Here, the *wantok* system of family life is prevalent. *Wantoks* are people of the same native village, language, or extended family. *Wantoks* provide help when a family needs it, for instance by performing household chores for an ill woman until she recovers.

Although the Solomon Islands can boast of a variety of ethnic groups present within its culture, the role and position of women does not differ much within these ethnic groups. This is as true for the patrilineal society of Malaita as it is for the matrilineal society of Guadalcanal.

Dress codes for women vary widely throughout the Solomon Islands, although most women prefer to dress modestly.

Legal Rights

Solomon Islands’ laws and Constitution provide equal legal rights for women without exception. However,

traditionally practiced discrimination and a lack of awareness have meant that most women fail to exercise their rights.

Solomon Islands’ women earned the right to vote in 1974 and the right to run for office in the same year. Although the Constitution provides women with the right to own property, customary laws followed in inheritance cases prevent them from inheriting and owning property, even in the matrilineal societies of Guadalcanal.

Abortion is illegal in the Solomon Islands, except when the life or the health of the mother is at stake. Government hospitals perform abortions free of charge.

The Solomon Islands’ Constitution gives women the right to initiate divorces, although it is extremely rare for a woman to actually initiate one. The courts usually make the final decision regarding the custody of the children, even though many marriages are customary law unions rather than civil ones.

Education

The Constitution of the Solomon Islands provides the same access to education for women as for men, and boys and girls study together in the same classrooms. Unfortunately, most women are unable to pursue their education, and the number of girls attending school in the Solomon Islands is the lowest in the entire Pacific region. Because education is neither free nor compulsory, poverty forces most girls in school to drop out after a few years. This has led to low literacy rates for women, with only 69 percent of Solomon Islander women being literate compared to 84 percent of men.

Women make up only 23 percent of the total work force, and they are engaged mainly in menial jobs in traditional service sectors. Very few women manage to obtain positions in the upper ranks of the civil services or major private enterprises.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, parents and relatives arranged marriages between Solomon Islanders, mostly to ensure the social and communal compatibility of the bride and groom. Times are changing, and many young people today choose their own spouses, mostly with the approval of the family.

Dating, per se, is not officially practiced, although many girls do have boyfriends and many marriages are “love” marriages. The average marrying age for Solomon Islander women is 21 years.

Tradition places Solomon Islander men at the head of the household where they make all major decisions, although women often play an important behind-the-scenes role in these decisions.

The Constitution provides women the right to own and inherit property, but discriminatory customary laws preempt the civil law in most parts of the Solomon Islands. Customary law prevents women from owning property, even when they inherit it directly in certain matrilineal societies.

Children are very important in Solomon Islands culture, and childless women may face disfavor. Polygamy is illegal.

In the event of a divorce, the court usually makes the final decision regarding custody of children. This holds true even for marriages performed under customary law.

Health

Women have equal, unrestricted access to medical care where it is available. All the hospitals in Solomon Islands are concentrated in the urban areas, with healthcare in the rural areas provided by clinics and first-aid posts. The Solomon Islands face a shortage of doctors and trained nurses, with many medical professionals having to travel to remote villages on a periodic basis to provide healthcare. However, more than 80 percent of Solomon Islander women have access to basic healthcare services.

The standards of medical care for women in the Solomon Islands are generally better than in many other countries. This is reflected in the low infant mortality rate, which stood at 19 deaths per 1,000 live births according to 2003 census records. The maternal mortality rate was unusually high in 2003 at 295 deaths per 100,000 live births, possibly because ethnic conflict at that time kept women from obtaining healthcare.

The Solomon Islands have one of the highest birth rates in the Pacific region. Contraceptive use is very low, mainly due to religious opposition, although the government has successfully implemented a few community-based contraceptive distribution programs. The men of the household usually make healthcare decisions, with women having a limited voice.

Interesting Social Customs

Solomon Islander culture does not permit a woman to step over a man, clothing, personal items, building materials, or market produce. Men are also not allowed to walk under a woman's belongings, like a clothesline, for example.

Women in Business

General View

The Solomon Islands is predominantly a male-dominated society where men make all important decisions. Women are generally restricted to the home (only 14 percent of people with formal paid employment are female). When they do venture out to work, women are limited to certain jobs and sectors. A common stereotype of women is that they are generally inefficient and even incompetent.

The National Parliament has no female members, while the Provincial Assembly has just one female member. Only 19 percent of women in the public sector hold senior positions. Women's participation in state committees and boards is also negligible, although the government is taking steps to increase their number. One such initiative was under the National Economic Recovery, Reform, and Development Plan of 2003-2006, which aimed to appoint a minimum of one female member to each of the boards of directors of state-owned organizations and public authority offices.

Low levels of education restrict women to jobs like teaching, medical services, and clerical administration. Today, Solomon Islands' women are slowly taking up

higher education in greater numbers and seeking better employment opportunities, especially in urban areas. They are also setting up their own businesses in sectors that were traditionally the domain of men.

Legal Rights

The state guarantees equal rights to men and women. Women have the right to vote, own businesses, and inherit real property. Non-governmental organizations and women-based organizations like the National Council of Women and the Family Support Center are playing an important role in making women aware of their rights.

Solomon Islanders are divided on the issue of inheritance. Some islands, like Malaita, follow the patrilineal line of inheritance, while others, like Guadalcanal, go by the matrilineal line. This is recognized by the courts on these islands and also by the national court system.

Women in Professions

Solomon Islands' women are primarily responsible for taking care of the house and the family. On the economic side, they engage in small tasks like gardening, gathering firewood or food, and making handicrafts. In the urban areas, educated women take up jobs in the public and private sectors, but usually in typically "feminine" jobs.

There are very few women in managerial positions in this country. Exceptions include Ruth Liloqila, the permanent secretary of the Women's Development Division in the Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Women's Affairs; Hilda Kari, the president of the National Council of Women; Ella Kauhue, the general secretary for the Solomon Islands' National Council of Women; and Serah Dyer, an important organizer at the Women's Leadership Desk at the National Council of Women.

Extended family members help working women in taking care of the children at home during work hours. The Department of Commerce, Employment, and Trade has jurisdiction over the establishment of childcare centers.

Women as Business Owners

Women are slowly entering the business arena as business owners, due to both public and private initiatives. For instance, a community micro-hydro scheme was started in Bulelavata, financed jointly by the provincial government and the Australian International Greenhouse Partnership. This scheme encouraged the involvement of women at all stages of the project, benefiting many women both economically and socially. The government, which is developing the potential of the country as a vacation hub, is also encouraging the involvement of women in eco-tourism.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen are well received in the Solomon Islands. Solomon Islanders treat women and elders with a lot of respect, particularly in rural areas. Individuals showing disrespect toward women are immediately forced to pay compensation.

Foreigners visiting a village customarily visit the village chief and discuss the reason for the visit and its duration. Solomon Islanders honor their guests, and members of the household eat only after the guest has eaten.

Solomon Islanders give more importance to long-term relationships than to short-term profits in business.

Somalia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Somali culture is overwhelmingly male-dominated, with women performing the household chores and men tasked with bringing in money to feed the family. However, Somali women are valued for their domestic labor as well as for the important economic roles they play in farming, herding, and running micro-economic businesses in the cities.

Women of all classes of society are expected to be subordinate to their men, to maintain their dignity by behaving "properly," and to take care of the house. Several women's groups and organizations have pushed hard for gender equality and for greater representation in the government. One notable success achieved by Somali women was to gain representation at the Arta Conference in 2000 as a "sixth clan."

With increasing levels of education, many Somali women are seeking to break out of the shackles placed on them in the name of tradition and culture. Somali women have also taken the initiative to restore peace and security in their communities by involving themselves in various reconciliation programs and political activities.

Although Somalia's Constitution provides for 12 percent of the seats in Parliament to be filled by women, they currently occupy only 8 percent of the seats in the Transitional Federal Parliament. One woman was appointed to head the Gender and Family Affairs portfolio in the cabinet, and two others were elected to the lower house of Parliament.

In the business sector, women mostly run small enterprises that deal with a variety of services like sewing, tailoring, knitting, cooking, weaving, and making handicrafts. Somali women's representation in the area of medicine too, is limited, with some women working as associate nurses in clinics and hospitals.

Urban Somali women are better off than their rural counterparts in terms of access to jobs, healthcare, education, and income generation opportunities. The role of women in various clans does not differ greatly, since tradition dictates that women cannot represent clans and are not even clan members.

Somali women must dress conservatively, in line with strict Islamic teachings. Although they are not required to wear the *hijab*, they must wear a headscarf at all times.

Legal Rights

Somalia's Constitution guarantees women the same legal rights as men without any discrimination whatsoever. Somali women were granted the right to vote in 1956. They also have the right to drive cars. With regard to inheriting property, Somali women are entitled to only half the amount of property their brothers receive.

Abortions in Somalia are governed by the Somali Penal Code of December 1962, which prohibits the practice. However, the law does provide for performing an abortion to save the life of the mother.

The law in Somalia currently consists of traditional customary law and Islamic *Shari'a* law, under which women have few rights. Somali men can divorce their wives by uttering the triple *talaq*, which means, "I divorce you." Somali women who want a divorce, however, have to appeal numerous times to an Islamic court and must have the backing of their birth family, without which it would be impossible for them to obtain a divorce.

Somali women's rights to the custody of their children are severely limited. Although mothers play a significant role in the care and upbringing of their children, the children always "belong" to the father.

Education

Poverty and the lack of educational facilities prevent most Somali girls from attending school. This is reflected in the literacy rate of Somali women, which currently stands at a poor 26 percent. Only about 20 percent of all Somali children enroll in primary schools, with girls making up 48 percent of those enrolled. Somali girls usually drop out after four years of primary education.

Because of widespread discrimination, even educated women are deprived of proper employment opportunities. Their access is limited to the lower rungs of the employment ladder, with very slim hopes of rising to the top.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditional Somali marriages were arranged ones, with grooms usually being a lot older and wealthier than their brides. Some clans, like the *Samaal* for example, usually marry outside their family lineage. The *Saab*, on the other hand, marry within the family lineage of their fathers, with many of them marrying their first cousins.

Somali women are not allowed to date, and the virginity of the bride holds a high value. The legal marriageable age for Somali women is 18 years, although exceptions are allowed based on necessity. Most Somali women get married during their teens. Somali women retain their father's name throughout their life and do not take their husband's name.

Although most marriages are monogamous, polygamy is legally and socially acceptable, with quite a few Somali men having as many as four wives.

Men are the heads of the household in Somalia. A Somali woman's status depends on the number of children she is able to bear, and it is considered very bad if the woman is childless.

Due to the high prevalence of divorce, a couple getting married usually signs an agreement that provides the bride with a certain amount of property should the couple divorce. The woman, however, relinquishes the right to the property if she is the one initiating the divorce. The children usually remain with the mother in the event of a divorce.

Women are allowed to inherit property, although tradition dictates that she receive only half the amount inherited by her brothers.

Health

Over 98 percent of Somali women are forced to undergo female genital mutilation (or female circumcision).

Healthcare facilities in Somalia are among the worst in Africa. More than 80 percent of Somalia's population does not have access to any healthcare service whatsoever. Moreover, with Somalia being a strict Islamic country, Somali women are highly reluctant to be treated by male physicians, thus precluding timely medical care in many cases.

Somalia's trained medical professionals attend to just two percent of births. The lack of healthcare facilities has translated into an estimated maternal mortality rate of 1,600 per 100,000, one of the highest in the world. Infant mortality rates stand at about 114 deaths for every 1,000 live births, also one of the highest in the world.

It is the husband who makes the final decision regarding his wife's healthcare. The concept of birth control is almost totally unknown in Somalia, where most women bear seven or eight children. Less than five percent of Somali women have reported using any form of contraceptive.

Interesting Social Customs

Men shake hands only with men and women with women.

Under the tradition of blood compensation, anyone found guilty of causing a woman's death is required to pay the woman's family only half the amount they would if the victim were male.

Women in Business

General View

Somali culture is traditionally male-dominant and patriarchal in nature. Men are expected to earn for the family while women take care of the home and family. The civil war in Somalia left thousands of men either killed or injured, thereby forcing women to work and earn an income for their families. Many Somali women are now involved in small businesses and in the country's commercial sector. Although women's responsibilities have increased drastically in Somalia, their status in society has not improved and they remain at the bottom of the social ladder.

The period after the civil war forced women to take on the dual roles of father and mother in their homes. These days, Somali women are very active in business and social activities. It is estimated that 80 percent of all Somali homes now depend solely on the income generated by women.

Legal Rights

Somali women do not have the same legal rights as men. They won the right to vote in 1956, but have not had the occasion to exercise that right for some time. In Somali families, inheritance passes from father to son, although under Islamic law, daughters are entitled to inherit half of the property the sons inherit.

The Somali government has passed laws stipulating equal pay for equal work irrespective of gender, but cultural realities have trumped this legislation, which has not been implemented.

Women in Professions

In farming families, women are responsible for planting and harvesting the crops, caring for the children, and cooking. Women from nomadic clans milk animals, process the milk, feed the family, collect firewood, cook, clean the house, wash the clothes and utensils, and care for the livestock.

There are very few Somali women who occupy top managerial posts in companies. An exception is Mariam Arif Qassim, a successful, well-known businesswoman who runs a busy hotel in Mogadishu.

Somalia is an Islamic country with several restrictions on the dress code of women, who dress conservatively.

The concept of daycare for children is new to Somalia, but the government provides Family Life Education Centers to take care of the children of working mothers. Members of their extended family, relatives, neighbors, or friends also help working mothers with childcare.

Women as Business Owners

The share of women owning their own businesses remains quite low. Women generally run small-scale businesses that focus on sewing, tailoring, knitting, cooking, tie dyeing, weaving or handicrafts, and agricultural goods.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign women intending to do business in Somalia may face opposition from local Somali businessmen, as most of them conduct business exclusively within their own ethnic groups. There are very few Somali businesses in the mainstream market.

Foreign businesswomen visiting Somalia should consider the country's Islamic culture and provide sufficient time for prayers during the workday. Businesswomen should dress conservatively, as revealing clothes are considered highly inappropriate. The country's strictly Muslim culture also prohibits drinking alcohol and eating pork.

Public interaction between the sexes is strictly prohibited. This includes women shaking hands with men. Women show respect by avoiding direct eye contact with a male colleague. Somali men may feel uncomfortable working for a female supervisor because of traditional attitudes regarding women.

Somalis consider it courteous to remove the shoes before entering a building.

South Africa

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The traditional cultures of South Africa have always considered women inferior to men and have confined women to household activities. South Africa's recent political and economic developments have offered women new opportunities as well as new impediments in their societal status.

The incorporation of new Constitutional reforms and the establishment of the Commission on Gender Equality in 1997 led to an improvement of the social and economic position of South African women. The Commission works with several government agencies to resolve gender-related complaints from the public and takes necessary steps to ensure gender equality. Despite new policies and reforms, however, women still suffer from persistent social and economic discrimination.

Women's participation in the South African government ranks eighth in the world, with women representing 30 percent of Parliament, 33 percent of Cabinet ministers, and 57 percent of deputy ministers. In addition, there is significant female representation in medicine, law, and business. Women are still, however, under-represented in decision-making positions. Of the total executive managers and directors in South Africa, women comprise only 15 and 7 percent respectively.

Rural women (a majority of the country's population) have limited access to education, healthcare, and the legal system, and many are confined to subsistence activities. They sometimes also have to take the full burden of family responsibilities because of male labor migration to cities and mining areas.

The perception of women's roles varies with the different sub-cultures of the nation. Women in the more affluent white and Asian minority communities generally have more education, personal freedom, and opportunities.

There are no dress code restrictions for women in South Africa. Women usually wear formal and European style clothing.

Legal Rights

The South African Constitution guarantees women equal rights in all spheres of life alongside men. South Africa granted the right to vote and contest elections to white women in 1930, Indian and "colored" women in 1984, and black women in 1994.

The right to inheritance differs among women in South Africa. White, Indian, and "colored" women inherit bilaterally: either the children receive all the property or the deceased's siblings of both sexes inherit. In the majority black community, the eldest son inherits all property and is responsible for his mother, younger siblings, and the other wives and children of his father.

The retirement age is 65 for men and 60 for women. Maternity benefits require employers to pay 45 percent of a woman's weekly earnings for up to 26 weeks.

In South Africa, abortion can be performed by a registered or government practitioner, usually with the consent of two other doctors.

Both women and men are legally entitled to initiate divorces. Although both parents have equal rights to child custody, women are usually given preference.

Education

South Africa provides women equal access to educational opportunities, and the government pays all or part of the fees for students of poor families in state schools. Women and men have practically the same literacy rate in the country: 87 percent for men and 85.7 percent for women. Usually boys and girls of any ethnic group share the same classroom space, although there are many single-sex academic institutions in South Africa as well.

The number of girls attending primary and secondary schools is higher than the number of boys (99 and 95 percent respectively), and women represent 48 percent of university students. However, the proportion of women graduating from higher education is a meager 7 percent, and women make up only 9 percent of engineering graduates.

Although the law states that men and women should get equal pay for equal work, educated South African women have fewer job opportunities, and they earn less on average than men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Generally, women have the freedom to choose their own partners, although the practice of arranged marriages, with or without a girl's consent, prevails among some religious groups in South Africa.

South African girls and boys are typically allowed to date from their teens, and they usually meet in educational and social settings. The legal marriageable age is 15 years for women and 18 years for men. The median age for getting married is typically 27.1 years for women and 28.9 years for men. In Southern African communities, the groom often pays *lobola* (bride price) to the bride's family.

Cohabitation is a growing tendency in South Africa, but statutory laws prohibit polygamy. African customary law allows this practice, but its occurrence is rare.

Women do not have the legal right to hold assets separate from their husbands or even to inherit property. Traditionally, men are the heads of the family with all decision-making powers, and women are held responsible for the family and household duties.

Women typically take their husbands' surname when they marry. In case of a divorce, women may revert to their former names. Childless women generally suffer from the social stigma attached to infertility.

In case of a divorce, the couples are entitled to an equal share of the joint property. The custody of children is usually granted to mothers, although financially stable fathers can also claim child custody.

Health

South African women have equal access to healthcare services. The country has many public and private health care services providing necessary medical assistance and information to all women and men. The government also provides free healthcare to pregnant women and children via state clinics and hospitals, with special emphasis on prenatal and postnatal care, childcare, family planning services, contraceptive devices, and prevention and treatment of hazardous diseases.

Nevertheless, the lack of medical staff and modern facilities has had a negative impact on women's health, particularly in rural areas, and the country's infant mortality rate is almost 61 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Laws permit women to make their own healthcare decisions, but in practice, women need the consent of their husbands before deciding upon the use of contraceptives or abortion services.

Women in Business

General View

In recent years, women's role in business and commerce has gained considerable recognition in South African society. Women continue to perform their traditional roles as home keepers and nurturers, and they still face social pressures, gender inequality, racial discrimination, and inadequate government support; nonetheless, many women are gaining financial freedom through informal sector entrepreneurship. Women are increasing their participation in male-dominated professions and businesses, and an encouraging number of women are now occupying top managerial positions.

South African women's progress is impeded by their generally limited access to higher education, new technologies, skills training, finance, and market information.

Legal Rights

The Constitution offers equal rights to men and women in all walks of life. With the end of apartheid, all South African women (formerly categorized as White, Indian, Colored, or Black) gained the universal right to vote and to run for elected office. Women also have the legal right to own, possess, or inherit property, although differences in traditional practices exist among the country's ethnic groups.

Similarly, the law assures equal education and employment opportunities to both sexes in South Africa. However, statistics reveal that on average, black women earn 89 percent of black men's earnings, while colored women earn 82 percent, Indian women 74 percent, and white women 60 percent of their respective men's earnings.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, South African women engage in subsistence agriculture on top of their family responsibilities. In business and the professions, many of them work in nursing, teaching, and the informal sector as traders and entrepreneurs.

South Africa ranks third among all countries in terms of the proportion of female senior managers in companies.

Some 17 percent are senior executives, 25 percent are senior managers, 24 percent are middle managers, and 28 percent are junior managers. Consequently, there are many well-known female business owners and executives in South Africa. Diane Radley is the chief financial officer of The Altron Group, and a director on the boards of Altech, BTG, and Omnia Holdings Limited. Nicky Newton-King is the deputy chief executive officer of JSE Securities Exchange, the world's 14th large exchange. Gloria Serobe, the founding member and executive director of WIPHOLD and CEO of Wipcapital, has received several awards for her entrepreneurial works. Thelma Mathamelo is a director and/or shareholder in the Diamond Bourse of Africa, the Ongoza/Diamcor Joint Venture, Royal Anthem Investments, Bonang Training and Development, Minrico, and Randgold and Exploration.

Working mothers depend on the help of extended family members, especially older siblings, in childcare. The Department of Housing and Health and the National Intelligence Services provide a few subsidized privately run daycare facilities. The absence of adequate and well-equipped childcare centers inhibits the progress of professional women.

Women as Business Owners

Women own nearly 40 percent of the small and medium-sized companies in South Africa. Women-owned businesses are mainly related to crafts, trading, personal services, and retail activities. Societal prejudices and the lack of legislation, information and training, and credit facilities hinder women's entrepreneurial activities. The government is emphasizing the empowerment of women entrepreneurs to improve South Africa's economy, acknowledging that the existing policies and programs are insufficient.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

South Africans generally behave courteously to foreign businesswomen, although chauvinism is not uncommon. South Africans favor personal meetings over impersonal communications like email, letters, or the telephone. Personal relationships built on mutual trust and confidence are key to any business deal.

Avoid scheduling business meetings from mid-December to mid-January, or in the two weeks adjoining Easter, as South Africans often take vacation during these times.

Foreign businesswomen should dress modestly in business suits or dresses, and behave politely. A formal handshake is the norm of greeting in business; however, men usually wait for foreign women to initiate the gesture. Never interrupt a South African when he or she is speaking.

South Korea

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The position of women in South Korean society has improved since the days when Confucianism dictated that a woman's place was within the four walls of her home. Contemporary women are playing an increasingly wider role in all areas of Korean society as it becomes an increasingly industrialized and affluent nation. Over one half of South Korean women are employed and one quarter of married Korean women work full-time. Women workers put in an average of over 50 hours a week, which is a few hours less than Korean men and much more than men or women in most other developed countries. Women also still face widespread discrimination and restrictive social conventions that confine them to certain professions such as nursing.

A Korean woman's position depends a lot on her social class. In the urban middle class, women may be more or less confined to the home, but they are well educated and make decisions within their households. Working-class women, on the other hand, venture out of the house and into the workforce more often, but this is often out of economic necessity and comes with a decrease in decision-making power at home.

In politics, women occupy only 20 of the 299 seats in the National Assembly, although the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition party are both women. In the judiciary, one of the 14 Supreme Court justices is a woman. Women also make up about 8.5 percent of all judges and prosecuting officers.

Rural South Korean women mostly work in the agricultural sector and lack access to the variety of educational and employment opportunities that their urban counterparts enjoy. They are also more vulnerable to traditional discriminatory customs and practices than urban women. To help them catch up with their urban counterparts, the government has begun initiatives to train rural women in skills required for work in technologically advanced workplaces.

South Korea has no linguistic or racial minorities, making it one of the world's most ethnically homogenous populations, and discrimination against interracial South Koreans is pervasive. Women who marry interracially and their children are subject to this social prejudice.

South Korean women follow a Western style of dress, and there are no particular dress code restrictions.

Legal Rights

South Korea women are guaranteed all the legal rights that men enjoy. They were granted the right to vote in 1948 and have the right to drive cars and to own and inherit property and assets. Laws prohibiting gender discrimination have increased the number of women in the workforce, but violence against women, including domestic abuse and rape, continues to be a very serious problem.

Abortions in South Korea are legal but subject to various restrictions. The procedure can be performed within 28 weeks of conception, with the consent of the pregnant mother and, if married, the concurrence of her spouse.

Women have the right to initiate divorces in South Korea, and divorced women can lay claim to custody of her children.

Education

South Korea's Constitution provides women equal access to education and forbids discrimination based on gender. According to 2003 estimates, the literacy rates for South Korean men and women are the same, at 99 percent. Almost all South Korean girls complete high school, and a large majority of them go on to pursue their college education. South Korea has a co-educational system of schooling, and men and women share the same classroom space.

Educated South Korean women have equal job opportunities as the men. In fact, women are deemed indispensable to certain sections of the South Korean workforce.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Most South Korean women, especially those living in the urban areas, have the freedom to choose their own spouses. However, many South Koreans still practice "arranged" marriages where relatives, friends, parents, or professional matchmakers facilitate meetings.

South Korean women typically begin dating in their early teens. Common places for women to meet men include educational institutions, workplaces, and social events. Most South Korean women get married in their mid-twenties.

South Korean customs require spouses to maintain their own surnames after marriage. Although men are the traditional heads of the households, many women are the *de facto* decision-makers. South Korean men expect their women to behave according to traditional submissive roles in public, but often cede decision-making powers at home to their wives. South Korean women are legally permitted to hold assets separately from their husbands.

One effect of the increasing educational and employment opportunities for South Korean women is that they are having fewer children and are having them later in life. The average number of children per family dropped from six children in 1962 to two in 1990, and more than half of children born in South Korea in 2002 had mothers who were aged 30 or older. An increasing number of households in South Korea are headed by single women.

Traditionally, boys were greatly favored at the expense of girls, hence the saying "One son is worth ten daughters" and the practice of selective abortions. Recent data showing that over 115 boys were born for every 100 girls born in Korea seem to indicate that these traditional preferences are still very much alive. Infertility carries a severe social stigma, though the acceptance of women who remain voluntarily childless is slowly gaining ground.

South Korean women have claim to an equal share of the conjugal property in the event of a divorce. Although the mother can claim custody of her children, she cannot register them in her own family registry. Children are always registered in the father's family registry and it remains that way even after a divorce.

Health

Women in South Korea are guaranteed equal access to all healthcare facilities and medical services. The standards of healthcare in South Korea are very good, often much better than those in Western developed countries. Under the National Health Insurance Act, every citizen is provided national health insurance. Maternal mortality rates for the year 2000 stood at 20 deaths per 100,000 live births and infant mortality rates for 2006 stood at 6.16 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Most South Korean women are not permitted to make their own healthcare decisions. For example, abortion laws require the consent of the woman's husband before the procedure can be performed.

The government supports family planning measures, and the use of contraceptives is widespread. More than 80 percent of women practice contraception, with 67 percent of them using modern contraceptive methods.

Interesting Social Customs

One unusual custom in South Korea is that of "booking." When same-sex groups visit bars, waiters tend to seat people of the opposite sex next to them. This practice is considered to be quite normal, and women accept this practice as a practical way to meet men and perhaps have a dance. There are no obligations between the groups, and everybody typically goes their separate ways afterwards.

Women in Business

General View

South Korean women have traditionally suffered heavy discrimination throughout their history. Although certain prejudices still persist, contemporary South Korean women have become increasingly active participants in the country's economic sector and now make up about half the South Korean workforce, although they still have a limited presence in the business sector.

The South Korean government has taken steps and initiatives to encourage more women to start their own businesses. These measures have led to an increase in the number of women-run businesses and recent trends suggest that the trend is set to continue.

Legal Rights

South Korean women enjoy the same legal rights as men. Women were granted the right to vote in 1948 and they also possess the rights to own a business as well as to own and inherit property.

Gender-based pay discrepancies exist in South Korea, and statistics indicate that women earn about 65 percent of what men earn for performing the same job.

Women in Professions

The traditional jobs for rural South Korean women are taking care of the household and working on the farm. Urban South Korean women are concentrated in the nursing and teaching sectors, although an increasing number are branching out into the scientific and technical fields. A huge portion of the female workforce can be found in South Korea's factories, especially on assembly lines.

There are quite a few female heads of companies in South Korea, although they are in a minority when compared to the number of males who head companies. For instance, Sung Joo Kim is the CEO of Sung Joo DandD, Jeong Myung-keum is the president of the Korean Women Entrepreneurs Association, and Kim Sung Joo, designated by Asiaweek magazine as one of Asia's Most Influential Women, is the CEO of the import retailing firm Sung Joo International.

Trends gathered from various studies indicate that the outlook is bright for women's increasing participation in the business sector and other areas traditionally occupied by men.

There are a few positions in the military from which women are barred. They include the artillery, armor, anti-air, and chaplaincy corps. South Korean women follow Western styles of dress and there are no dress code restrictions that prevent them from taking up certain jobs.

Most South Korean women quit their jobs after giving birth in order to take care of the child. However, if the mother continues working, childcare is assumed by members of the extended family or, in the case of urbanites, by state-sponsored day-care centers.

Women as Business Owners

There are many women who own their own businesses and trends suggest that the numbers will continue to increase. Most women-owned businesses focus on clothing, cosmetics, food processing, jewelry, natural products, home appliances, health, ceramics, souvenirs, and magazine publishing.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

South Korean business people have no problems in dealing with foreign businesswomen, although some of them do tend to look upon foreign women in general as sex objects.

First appearances are extremely important in South Korea, so women are advised to wear smart clothes that are not too revealing. The concept of a private space is foreign to South Koreans, who usually stand quite close together. Touching someone who is not a relative or close friend, however, is considered distasteful.

Holding hands is common among friends of the same sex who have only platonic relationships with each other, which should not be mistaken for homosexuality. Women who are close friends may even wrap their arms about the other's waist.

Spain

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Spain is a steadily developing country with a history of patriarchal domination and strong Roman Catholic influence on society. The integration of Spain with Europe, the decreasing role of the Church, and the changing attitudes towards the role of women over the years, however, have moved Spanish women out of the sole role of performing family and household responsibilities. Now they are more active in higher education, politics, business, law, health, and all other sectors of Spanish life.

In Spanish Parliament, women comprised 64 (40.5%) of the 158-seat Senate (upper house), 126 (36%) of the 350-seat lower house, and eight of the 16-member cabinet. There are a significant number of female lawyers, journalists, and medical staff in Spain as well. Statistics also reveal that about 32 percent of Spanish business owners are women.

Urban and more affluent Spanish women have comparatively more prospects and privileges than their rural counterparts do. There are also substantial regional differences in the prosperity of women, with the country's affluence generally concentrated in the north of the country.

Spanish women mostly wear modest and loose-fitting clothes like skirts and blouses or long pants. They tend not to wear shorts or sleeveless garments in public.

Legal Rights

The Spanish Constitution guarantees women the same rights as men in social, economic, and political areas. They have had the right to vote and contest elections since 1931 and also have the right to own, possess, and inherit property.

Abortion is allowed with the approval of two physical examiners, and in only certain circumstances like rape, fetal deformation, or to save the pregnant woman's life.

Spanish women have the right to initiate divorces on various grounds, including mutual consent. Generally, mothers receive the custody of children along with child maintenance from the fathers.

Education

Spain offers equal access to free and compulsory public education for all girls and boys aged between six and 16. The average adult female literacy rate was equal to the average male's rate at 99 percent. Primary and secondary school enrollment is also comparable between women and men. Nearly 80 percent of women enroll in university, and others pursue technical diplomas. Academic institutions in Spain are largely coeducational.

Female participation is nearly 41 percent of the total labor force. Spanish women, however, earn 30 to 40 percent less than men and seldom occupy top ranking positions.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Spanish women choose their own partners. Spanish girls and boys start dating from 14 years of age, and usually meet through group activities or in social settings. The legal age for marriage is 18 years, and the median age at which women first marry is in their early twenties (men marry in their late twenties).

The majority of Spanish women retain their maiden names after marriage; however, a few women combine their maternal surname with the husband's paternal surname, suffixed with a *de*. Traditionally, women were primarily responsible for all household chores and child rearing, while men met the economic needs of the family, but a recent change in Spanish law requires men to share 50 percent of domestic work with women.

Women have the legal right to hold assets separate from their husbands. Legislation prohibits polygamy, but it still occurs in some remote areas of Spain.

Spanish society gives substantial importance to motherhood, and many believe that a woman's life is incomplete if she has no children.

A divorced wife is entitled to receive compensation from her husband for all the work done for him or the household, in the form of either money or assets. The Spanish courts usually grant split, and not joint, custody of children with a preference given to the mothers. Child maintenance is paid in terms of a percentage (personal minimum tax) of the non-custodial parent's income.

Health

Spain grants women and men equal access to the widespread network of medical services. The national healthcare system provides excellent maternity and infant care, and helps keep Spain's infant and maternal mortality rate among the world's lowest at 4.37 infant deaths per 1,000 live births and 4 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. The life expectancy of women is around 82 years, compared to 73 years for men.

Traditional Spanish society regards family planning as offensive and has inhibited women from using contraception. Nevertheless, today's women have the legal right to make their own healthcare decisions, including abortion and birth control, and the use of contraceptives is quite high at nearly 60 percent.

Interesting Social Customs

Spanish women's use of the *mantilla*, or traditional dark headscarf, is a legacy of North Africa's Islamic traditions during its 500-year occupation of Spain. Many words in Spanish also have Arabic roots, including the phrase *Ojala que sí* (I hope so), which is basically a version of the phrase "If Allah wills it."

Women in Business

General View

Traditional Spanish society restricted women from working outside the home and held women solely responsible for family care and domestic chores. Since its transition to democracy, however, Spain has experienced a noticeable transformation in the role and perception of women, especially in business and the professions. Women's participation rate in Spain's labor force (presently at 43 percent) has increased steadily, and women now comprise one-third of all entrepreneurs.

In spite of the number of women working in the public and private service sector and owning small enterprises, the majority of senior management positions in Spain remain occupied by men. Men, in general, still earn substantially more than women. High unemployment rates, the lack of part-time jobs, and gender disparity in the workplace also inhibit women's overall representation in the economy.

Legal Rights

The Spanish Constitution guarantees women and men equal rights in all areas of life. Spain gave women the right to vote and to run for office in 1931. Women can also legally own and run a business and inherit property.

The law assures equal pay for equal work to all citizens, but, on average, Spanish women earn 30 to 40 percent less than men for the same work.

Women in Professions

In Spain, there are no jobs considered traditional for women, but they have a significant presence in education (as professors and librarians), journalism, healthcare (as nurses), public administration, and social services. Women make up 47 percent of all professional and technical workers and 30 percent of administrators and managers. They are also entering male-dominated professions, such as engineering and finance. However, women hold a mere 18 percent of senior management and decision-making positions in Spain, and these are mostly in family-owned businesses.

A few of the eminent businesswomen in Spain are Ana Patricia Botín, chairman of Banco Español de Crédito and executive chairman of Banesto (a unit of Grupo Santander); Esther Koplowitz, head of Fomento de Construcciones y Contratas, a leading Spanish construction group; and Alicia Koplowitz, founder of Morinvest and Omega Capital and one of the richest women in the world.

Legislation does not prohibit women from entering any profession. However, many employers hesitate to hire young married women because of their obligations to provide maternity leave and other benefits.

Generally, Spanish women dress fashionably in suits or business dresses and avoid wearing shorts in public.

Mothers are the primary care providers for their children. Working women usually get help from relatives, friends, or neighbors or use local childcare centers to take care of their children during work hours. The number of public daycare centers remains inadequate, while the private ones charge heavy fee.

Women as Business Owners

Some 32 percent of Spain's entrepreneurs are women. Most of them either come from lower-income groups or run their family businesses. More than 80 percent of women entrepreneurs own small-scale businesses in the service sector, including banking and financial services.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Spanish businesspeople generally treat foreign businesswomen with deference. However, foreign businesswomen may experience a degree of chauvinism from their Spanish male counterparts.

Foreign businesswomen should dress professionally and behave politely. A formal handshake is the usual norm of greeting, and it is advisable not to make any physical contact such a hug or pat on the back. Make use of the initial meetings to establish a good personal relationship with your counterparts.

Although local businessmen will accept an invitation from foreign businesswomen for business lunches or dinners, they prefer to pay the bill. Foreign women may want to avoid dining alone in a restaurant at night.

Sri Lanka

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Sri Lankan women have a higher level of gender equality than women in other Asian countries. They benefit from free medical care and educational facilities, and these cornerstones have resulted in increasing numbers of women pursuing higher education and holding managerial positions.

Sri Lanka is, however, still a traditional patriarchal society where women, especially the poor, carry the burden of household responsibilities on top of their jobs. Women from the upper social and economic classes have better access to education and high-paying jobs. Women from the lower classes are mostly relegated to working in the low-paying sectors and have a difficult time acquiring new skills and knowledge that may help them advance professionally.

The government has taken welfare measures to protect the status of women, with special attention to literacy, maternity care, and preventing sexual harassment at the workplace. The Women's Affairs Ministry safeguards the fundamental rights of women and makes sure that the welfare schemes reach rural and urban women uniformly.

Sri Lanka has the distinction of having produced the world's first female Prime Minister. There are 11 parliamentarians in a house of 225 members and three ministers. In the judiciary, the Supreme Court has two female judges. A large number of women hold medical degrees and work as doctors, nurses, and medical personnel. Many Sri Lankan women own micro or small-sized businesses, mostly in the informal sector.

In villages, women serve as a source of cheap agricultural labor and are paid less than their male counterparts. Urban women having better access to educational and economic opportunities find employment in the public and private sectors.

The on-going ethnic struggle in the Northern and Eastern regions of the country has had an adverse impact on the educational, health, and employment prospects of both Sinhalese and Tamil women in or near the areas of conflict. Muslim customs also affect the position of women on the Eastern coast.

Domestic violence against women is a problem in Sri Lanka, and the ethnic struggle has also seen many instances of harassment and violence toward women.

There are no particular dress restrictions for Sri Lankan women, who wear Western or Indian-style outfits.

Legal Rights

Sri Lanka's Constitution provides women with the same rights as men. However, other customary laws, such as the Thesawalamai Law, Muslim Law, and the Kandyan Law, which are applied in the Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhalese regions, respectively, differ in the rights they grant to women.

Women earned the right to vote in 1931. They also have the right to drive cars. Sri Lankan property laws consider men and women on equal grounds, but traditional practices favor men.

Sri Lanka's laws prohibit abortions in all situations except when the life of the mother is at stake.

Women have the right to initiate divorce, but their difficulty in doing so varies according to the individual laws of each community. In a divorce, women have the right to claim custody of their children.

Education

Women have equal rights to education, and Sri Lanka's female literacy rates are among the highest in Asia. This can be attributed to the government's policy of providing free education at the primary, secondary, and university levels. The literacy rate for women is about 91 percent, as compared to 95 percent for the men. Rural women have fewer educational facilities and a lower literacy rate.

Almost all Sri Lankan girls complete their primary schooling. A majority of them go on to complete their secondary and higher education as well. Schools are coeducational.

The rate of female unemployment is twice as high as for men, so educated women are often forced to take up low-profile jobs that fetch them low incomes. The civil war has also adversely affected career opportunities for women.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages are the most common, especially in rural areas. Sri Lankan women can choose their life partners, although this is relatively rare. Women do not practice Western styles of dating. Girls usually start meeting boys surreptitiously during their teens at schools, colleges, parks, and other common meeting places.

Eighteen is the legally approved age for girls to get married. The median age of marriage for girls is increasing and currently stands at about 20 years old. Sinhalese and Tamil women take their husband's name and retain their own names.

Sri Lankan women have the right to independently possess, purchase, or dispose of movable or immovable assets, even after marriage. Women exercise a decisive say in important family issues; however, it is the oldest male member with whom the actual authority rests.

A woman is expected to become a mother as soon after marriage as possible.

Polygamy is not legally approved, but Muslims do not consider polygamy an offence and there are cases of polyandry as well. Muslim laws require that all wives be treated equally, although this is not always the case.

In a divorce, the woman can claim a share of the marital property. It is usually the father who gets custody, although the courts take the child's best interests into account.

Health

The Sri Lankan government provides free medical assistance to all its citizens. Medical facilities in far-flung areas and in areas vulnerable to ethnic conflicts are scarcer and less well funded.

Almost all births in Sri Lanka take place under skilled medical supervision. The maternal mortality rate is estimated at anywhere between 70 to 90 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is an impressive 13 deaths per 1,000 live births. The female life expectancy rate has also been steadily increasing.

Women have the right to make their own healthcare decisions, though the extent of this freedom depends heavily on the ethnic and religious community to which they belong.

Contraceptive methods such as IUDs, injectables, and condoms are easily available and generally used. Women may also receive counseling from trained medical staff on family planning issues.

Interesting Social Customs

Sri Lanka's Hindu traditions do not give daughters the right to perform funeral rites, even for their own parents. In fact, they cannot even enter the crematorium grounds.

Women in Business

General View

In general, the status of women in Sri Lanka is much better than that of women in other developing countries. Sri Lankan women have been actively engaged in the country's economic activities and significantly contribute to the country's export-oriented economy. Women still have to contend with gender inequality issues, however, and the lack of access to professional skills development, management training, market information, and technology has inhibited the expansion of self-employed women.

The policies adopted by Sri Lanka's government encourage self-employment among women for better income generation. It also facilitates credit and saving projects without collateral from special banks and includes programs to improve self-reliance among women.

Legal Rights

Sri Lanka's laws guarantee women equal rights in all spheres of society. Sri Lankan women received the right to vote in 1931. Women also have the right to invest in, inherit, possess, or transfer businesses or property.

Gender-based pay discrimination in Sri Lanka keeps the daily wage rate of women between 100 and 150 rupees versus 200 rupees for men.

Women in Professions

Most of Sri Lanka's women are involved in teaching, nursing, secretarial assistance, domestic service, assembly line industries, and agriculture. A few of them are technologists, engineers, surveyors, technicians, and skilled workers. Women's participation is highest in the country's garment sector, where 90 percent of the workers are female and wages are marginal.

Figures reveal that women hold less than one percent of the country's senior administration and managerial positions. Examples of prominent Sri Lankan businesswomen include Aban Pestonjee, chairperson and managing director of electrical home appliance manufacturer Abans Ltd., and Anoma Gamage, managing director of garment manufacturer the Daya Group of Companies. The outlook for the growth of businesswomen in Sri Lanka is very positive because of prevailing laws and customs that "level the playing field" for businesswomen in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan women are not barred from entering any business or profession, but the country's Factories Ordinance restricts work by women between 9p.m. and 6a.m. Women follow a casual but professional dress code in the workplace.

The children of working mothers are usually cared for by other members of their family or by neighbors. Some of them go to private daycare centers. Sri Lanka does not provide any government-sponsored childcare services.

Women as Business Owners

The number of female entrepreneurs has seen a steady increase in Sri Lanka, and women-owned businesses tend to be small sewing and dressmaking businesses. More affluent women are involved in the country's traditional export-oriented businesses.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Sri Lankans are generally friendly, open-minded, religious, and loyal, and women are respected and valued. Foreign businesswomen have no problem conducting business in Sri Lanka.

Conservative standards dictate that foreign women be careful about wearing modest clothes, removing hats and shoes before entering houses and places of worship, and taking photos of holy men, military installations, Muslim women, or people posed in front of a statue of Buddha.

It is appropriate to shake hands and exchange visiting cards upon greeting someone. If you are visiting a Sri Lankan home, never refuse an offer of tea.

Sudan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Time-honored, and very gender-biased, traditions dictate the lives of Sudanese women. They generally spend their youth doing household chores for their family and then get married shortly after puberty to play the same role in their new families where their worth is basically defined by the number of cattle given in the dowry.

Girls do not have much access to education, leading to a very low level of literacy, and they encounter discrimination elsewhere in Sudan's predominantly patriarchal society. Once married, women are expected to comply with the wishes of their husbands. Adding to these burdens are the crushing facts that many women have also had to assume the role of bread winners due to the lack of men in war-torn Sudan, and displaced women disproportionately fall victim to mindless violence.

Higher economic and educational standing has a major effect on the position of a woman in society, although only a handful of women (professors, lawyers, bureaucrats) in the urban elite have these privileges. Political representation includes a Constitutional guarantee to a share of seats in parliament and a few female ambassadors. In business, there are only a few women entrepreneurs, and economic activity mostly takes place in rural areas where 21.4 percent of women involve themselves in economic activities, versus the urban areas where only 10.1 percent of women are active.

Regional differences exist in the treatment of women as well. In Western and Southern Sudan, women play important roles in the agrarian sector, while those in Northern towns undergo harassment. The Nuba people treat their women more freely, while women who belong to the Beja group are generally more submissive.

Government and Islamic laws stipulate a conservative dress code that ensures that no body part is visible. Women tend to wear Iranian-style *Chador*-like attire (a loose, usually black robe worn by Muslim women that covers the body from head to toe) made of black, synthetic fabric, which the government sells at subsidized rates. White and cream-colored *thobes* (a long shirt-like dress) are, however, gaining in popularity.

Legal Rights

Women have had the right to vote since 1964, and they are allowed to drive. Article 21 of the constitution enshrines the equality of men and women in the eyes of the law. Fundamental Islamic laws and civil war make the reality of equality for women a different matter. Laws of inheritance differ from tribe to tribe. Among the Azande, clans people destroy the agricultural goods of the deceased in order to check the amassing of wealth. In the Fur clan, the men of the family sell inherited goods and split any property. Among the Arabs, the eldest son is the heir apparent and, even though a woman may have lawful right over her share, she can only inherit half of what her male counterparts inherit.

Sudanese laws do not permit abortion, and people who perform them can be sentenced to three years in prison or a fine. These laws do permit abortion when there is necessity to save the life of the mother, the pregnancy due to physical abuse, or if the baby is still-born. It is a telling fact that most maternal deaths are due to illegal abortions.

Men have the right to launch divorce proceedings, but a woman cannot do so unless her husband is medically proven impotent, has committed domestic violence, or is imprisoned. Divorce courts grant custody of children to the mother for a specific period. Later on, the father bears the duty of child rearing.

Women are prohibited from working in dangerous jobs (this broad definition includes workplaces like gas stations) and are rarely hired for many other types of work (cafeteria workers, drivers).

Education

The Sudanese government ensures accessibility and fairness in all educational fields, and women now outnumber men in the universities. Seventy five percent of girls have completed some secondary education, and 50 percent of women are literate. These figures vary depending on where you are in the country. In the Northern states, boys and girls share equal access to education, while people in Southern states are more concerned about surviving the civil war. Parents tend to give more preference to boys in case of financial hardship. Boys and girls share the same roof in schools. Seventy nine percent of women work in the agricultural sector, and the remaining find a place in educational, technical, and judicial sectors.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Markets, dances, and schools serve as the common meeting places for boys and girls. Girls normally get married once they attain puberty, or, in some cases, when they become ten years old, with judicial consent. Sudanese women do not enjoy the privilege of choosing their grooms. It is always the parents and relatives who choose the groom, and they consider marriage as a union of two families in terms of money rather than of two individuals. Women do interact with men (not Western-style dating), but parents have their say when it comes to marriage. Islamic tenets authorize polygamy, and in such a case the wives should receive equal treatment. Islamic law allows women to own and dispose of property. Contrary to Western practice, the women do not take the husband's name after a wedding.

A marriage is said to consummate in bearing children. Not having children, especially boys, is grounds for filing divorce or undertaking a second marriage. When the circumstances demand divorce, the husband has to reimburse the dowry or the bride price. The mother usually receives custody until the son or daughter reaches seven years and nine years respectively. Under special circumstances this provision gets extended.

Health

Sudan's health ministry has made ample healthcare provisions for women. Even the Southern parts of Sudan receive considerable medical aid. Despite the quality of healthcare, a great deal of women die in childbirth (590 deaths for every 100,000 births), and the infant mortality rate remains quite high (at 60 deaths for every 1,000 live births). Family planning measures and contraceptive devices are available free of cost, but women need their husband's consent to obtain them. In Northern Sudan, the use of contraceptive devices has increased.

Interesting Social Customs

The society prevents women from traveling abroad without the consent of their husbands or male guardians. Even in photographs furnished for passport purposes, the women must adhere strictly to the dress code.

Women in Business

General View

Women comprise nearly half of the total population of Sudan and constitute 26.5 percent of the total work force, up from only 7 percent in the 1960s. While their major contribution is in the agricultural sector, a number of women have availed themselves of the educational system, opened up to them in the 1960s, and have entered the professional fields as doctors, lawyers, professors, journalists, teachers, army officers, and diplomats.

The 21-year civil war in Sudan has basically spelled disaster for women. They can often only find employment in informal sectors with highly inadequate pay, and they are weighed down by poverty and violence. The resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in Sudan has also undermined women's status in a major way. The one silver lining from the internal conflicts that have ravaged Sudan is the fact that a great number of men are caught up in the war, and women have had to become the main wage earners, opening up some new opportunities for them.

Legal Rights

Women have had the right to vote in Sudan since 1964. Constitutionally, Sudanese women enjoy parity with men under Article 21, and some labor laws ensure this right. However, one highly discriminatory Sudanese law prevents a woman public sector employee (who has right to residential land) from owning residential land if her husband already owns land. Furthermore, if her husband does not own land, her land rights (as a government employee) are transferred to him. Under customary laws, women have more or less equal right over rain-fed lands versus irrigated lands (an important distinction in such an arid country).

In matters of inheritance, male heirs get twice the share of female heirs. Also, a non-Muslim widow is not entitled to inherit her husband's property unless she is specifically declared a beneficiary in the will.

With the passage of time, women in Sudan have moved into various avenues of public life, and this has met with very little criticism. However, the remuneration women get is less than that of their male counterparts, especially in the agricultural sector where the women are paid in kind.

Women in Professions

Seventy nine percent of working women are farmers. Another 12 percent are involved in social services. Other active professional areas for Sudanese women include nursing, secretarial work, and teaching. In an encouraging trend, women now hold 24 percent of "technical" positions. Some women have become physicians, lawyers, diplomats, and university professors, and a small handful, 3.3 percent, have reached top-level management positions. The political scenario is similar with just 3 women occupying ministerial berths.

Notable Sudanese women include: Samia Shabo, the secretary general of the Sudanese Business Women Union; author and playwright Leila Aboulela; and Zeinab Muhammad Mahmoud Abd al-Karim, Sudan's first woman ambassador.

Women are prohibited from becoming attendants in gas stations, working in hotels, or working anywhere after 10p.m. Women's organizations are protesting these restrictions, and the courts have yet to pass a ruling on them. The government has tried to enforce Iranian *Chador*-like attire (a loose, usually black, robe worn by Muslim women that covers the body from head to toe) on Sudanese women, but more traditional *thobes* (a long shirt-like Sudanese dress) are more popular.

In traditional sectors like agriculture, women carry their children tied to their sides or back. Homemaking is the mandatory role of women and so is the upbringing of children. The Ministry of Health offers some daycare centers to help working women.

Women as Business Owners

The majority of Sudanese women work on farms. Cotton production, cattle rearing, and dairy processing are among the areas where women work the most.

Many other Sudanese women run small-scale trading operations, although the government restriction against working after sunset, peak time for many retail businesses, limits their activity. Women are also involved in manufacturing and design in the Sudanese garment industry.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen can be sure they will face wariness and caution from their male Sudanese counterparts. A polite, respectful, and complementary approach to Sudanese culture will help build important good will and will help overcome any initial apprehension. You can expect a personal invitation to visit a Sudanese home, and it is important that you accept this invitation. Wear conservative business attire with long skirts and long-sleeve tops. When you speak with a person of the opposite sex, allow a fair amount of personal space. Address your Sudanese colleagues by their first name preceded by *Uztaz* for male and *Uztaza* for female (a sign of high regard). Be extremely cautious about traveling within Sudan, since so many places (the Eritrean border, southern Sudan in general, Darfur, Kassala) are very dangerous.

Suriname

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

As Suriname's multicultural society develops both politically and economically, its female citizens are moving out of their traditional roles as home-keepers and finding more social and financial independence. The government has committed itself to gender equality and improving the status of its female citizens, and this has led to an increased number of women actively participating in various areas of society over the past few years. Surinamese women are, however, still a long way from equality with their male counterparts in all aspects of life.

Suriname has the most diverse range of ethnic groups of all South American countries, and the position of women in each ethnic group varies according to unique customs and social practices. Creoles, for instance, have a matriarchal society, whereas Hindustani people follow a patriarchal structure.

The position of Surinamese women is also dependent on their social and economic class. Women from the upper strata of society lead decidedly better lives, with access to education, healthcare, and good jobs. Lower class women live in poverty and work in the informal sector, which is characterized by poor working conditions, irregular working hours, low income, and health risks.

Domestic violence is a social problem, with statistics indicating that more than half of Surinamese women are regularly beaten by their partners.

In politics, women occupy 10 out of the 51 seats in the National Assembly. There are also three women in the Cabinet and quite a few female judges, including some in the Court of Justice. About 22 percent of Suriname's lawyers are women. A number of women work in the medical sector as nurses and aides. In the business sector, a large number of Surinamese women own micro- and small-sized enterprises.

In urban areas, women mainly work in educational and administrative jobs, whereas rural women are usually engaged in small-scale agricultural activities. Rural women are burdened with poor infrastructure, limited markets, poor access to credit, low literacy, a lack of services, and no family planning policies.

There are no dress code restrictions for women in Suriname. Women generally wear informal and casual clothes suitable to the climate for all occasions.

Legal Rights

Suriname's Constitution provides women with equal rights to those enjoyed by men. Women received the right to vote in 1948, and they also have the right to own, possess, and inherit property. In practice, however, social customs often inhibit women from fully enjoying their civil and political rights.

In Suriname, abortions are illegal and are only permitted in situations where the life of the mother is at stake.

Under the Civil Code, women can initiate divorce. Either parent can obtain legal custody of the children.

Education

Suriname provides free and compulsory education for all children between the ages six and 12, irrespective of gender. Most schools in Suriname are co-educational, although single-sex educational institutions do exist.

The female literacy rate is about 85 percent, as compared to the male rate of 92 percent. Most Surinamese girls complete their primary schooling. An increasing number of Suriname's women are enrolling in higher and graduate academic levels.

Educated women in Suriname are legally entitled to equal employment opportunities, but in reality, most educated women continue to face gender-based discrimination.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Most Suriname women choose their own partners, although traditional Hindu families still arrange marriages. Dating is not prohibited in Suriname, and girls usually begin dating when they reach their teens. Common meeting places for young men and women include educational institutions and social events.

The minimum legal age at which women in Suriname can marry is 15 years. Usually, women take their husband's name after marriage. Surinamese women are legally entitled to hold property separately from their husbands, though that almost never happens. Property is usually kept within the husband's family.

The core responsibilities of the household and child rearing are performed by women, but the chief decisions are made by the men. Since the primary role of women in Suriname is considered to be bearing children, a failure to do so bears a social stigma.

Although polygamy is illegal, it is still practiced among the Maroons. In these households, the first wife is considered to be superior to the other wives.

Depending on the laws under which a divorce is granted, women may or may not be eligible for a share in the marital property. The court usually makes the final decision regarding custody of the children, keeping the children's best interests in mind.

Health

People living in urban areas have equal access to affordable primary healthcare services. The poor and indigenous sections of the people face difficulties due to geographical remoteness and transportation problems.

Statistics indicate that about 85 percent of all births in Suriname take place in the presence of a trained medical attendant. The current maternal mortality rate is 110 deaths per 100,000 live births and the infant mortality rate is 30 fatalities per 1,000 live births.

Surinamese women are legally permitted to make their own healthcare decisions; however, statistics indicate that a majority of women make such decisions in consultation with their partners.

About 42 percent of Suriname's women use contraceptives. The Stichting Lobi, Suriname's family

planning organization, offers medical, family planning, and counseling services through trained personnel and also provides sex education to school children.

Interesting Social Customs

In the villages, men present their new wives with a boat for easy commuting between the agricultural lands and the islands on which their homes are located.

In rural areas, menstruating women are restricted from cooking for men, touching men's items, taking part in sacred rites, washing in the river, or socializing in the community.

Women in Business

General View

Surinamese views on women in business are relatively negative, and Surinamese women's participation in the labor force is very low. However, organizations like the Suriname-based Women's Business Group are trying to transform women's status in the economic and social spheres. The government has also initiated a few reforms to increase the participation of women in the country's economic arena. Suriname's economic development, which is the slowest in South America, severely hinders women from finding employment or starting their own businesses.

Legal Rights

Surinamese women have the same legal rights as men, including the right to vote and to own or inherit businesses and property. In reality, however, traditional cultural barriers prevent many women from exercising these rights.

Although no statistics are available, gender-based disparities do exist, and Surinamese women earn lower salaries than men for performing the same job.

Women in Professions

Some 60 percent of Surinamese women work as secretaries, receptionists, and elementary school teachers. A few also work as beauticians.

Statistics reveal that women hold only 3 percent of all managerial positions and 9 percent of mid-level positions. Since the participation of women in Suriname's economy is meager, there are very few female business owners or executives. One of the most well known is Luzmila Samson, managing director of Sampa Suriname Ltd., an enterprise that manufactures furniture.

In general, Suriname is a consuming, not a producing, economy. Moreover, the government does not provide incentives or promote entrepreneurship for either men or women, resulting in an insignificant growth rate for businesses owned by either sex.

State-sponsored childcare is available in Suriname. Working mothers also make use of other members of their family or private daycare centers to take care of their children during work hours.

Women as Business Owners

Not many women own businesses in Suriname, although trends indicate that more women are starting their own businesses despite limited access to finance. Surinamese

businesswomen are starting small-scale firms in agriculture, manufacturing, services, and petty trade. Other women-owned businesses involve handicraft works such as quilts, handbags, and pot holders; textile works; food and beverages; fruit products; services; and horticulture.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Surinamese are generally very friendly, and their attitude towards foreign people is similar to that of the United States.

Business dealings take place at dinners, cocktail parties, or business lunches. Surinamese engage in a business deal only after building a considerable working relationship and after a detailed consultation process.

Casual clothing is acceptable, even for business meetings, due to the humid climate. However, businesspeople wear suits when meeting senior government officials.

Police authority, transportation, and medical facilities in Suriname are generally insufficient in an emergency; therefore, foreigners should avoid traveling alone, especially with valuable articles.

Visitors to a Surinamese home should remove their footwear before going inside. The Surinamese commonly shake hands before any conversation with a newcomer and greet good friends with a *brasa* (hug).

Swaziland

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Swaziland's traditional culture regards women as minors and requires women to seek the permission of their husbands or close male relatives to borrow money, open a bank account, acquire a passport, leave the country, gain access to land, or get a job. Widespread gender discrimination restricts women to household chores and to a generally subservient role in society.

Swazi society gives greater importance to sons than daughters and denies women equal access to education and job opportunities. Lack of capital and legal property rights tends to suppress women's business ambitions. Domestic violence and sexual abuse are societal problems, especially for rural women, since there is no protective body or agency they can turn to for help.

The migration of men to urban areas in search of work has forced women to take on the twin responsibilities of farm work and domestic chores. Many women from the lower social and economic strata of society lead lives filled with physical and psychological hardship.

The government has held seminars and workshops to make women aware of their rights and to combat discrimination. Changes in socio-economic conditions, urbanization, and an increasing number of women leaders in the government and public sectors have created a climate for progressive change in the status of women.

Swazi women have a low representation in politics and the judiciary. Women occupy only 30 percent of seats in the upper house and about 11 percent in the lower house. In the judiciary, judges who serve on the country's highest courts are all foreigners, mostly South Africans. In the business sector, women own 70 percent of all micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises.

Desertification and poverty have adversely affected the traditional roles of both men and women. Rural women involved in agriculture have to travel long distances in search of water and other necessities.

Swaziland has a number of different clans, but the position of women in each of these clans does not differ much.

Swazi women dress casually in modest clothes for work and they usually reserve short skirts for social evenings. There are no dress code restrictions.

Legal Rights

Swazi women received the right to vote in 1968. Constitutionally, Swazi women have all legal rights, but traditional practices and customary laws severely restrict the exercise of these rights. Property and inheritance laws are highly discriminatory against women. Women do not have the right to own property, and inheritances are passed on to the male children only.

The Constitution does not have explicit rules governing abortions. The Roman-Dutch common law allows the performance of abortions only when the life of the mother is in danger.

Women can initiate a divorce, although because of social norms they seldom do so. The right to the custody of children is always vested with the father and his family.

Education

Generally, urban Swazi women have better access to education than rural women. All boys and girls receive primary education in Swaziland, but a large number of Swazi girls drop out at the secondary levels of schooling.

Swazi men and women have similar literacy rates at 80.8 percent for the women and 82.6 percent for the men. Swazi boys and girls share the same classroom space.

Employment opportunities are extremely limited in Swaziland, and men are usually preferred over women for most job openings.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages are the norm in rural Swaziland, while most urban girls choose their own spouses. The practice of forced marriages is a problem.

Western-style dating is practiced in the urban areas. Most Swazi girls begin dating in their teens, and the most popular places for meeting men include social events and school.

Although the statutory law sets 21 as the legal age of marriage for women, most girls get married when they reach 16 years of age. Swazi women take on their husband's surname upon marriage, but retain their connection in their paternal clan.

The number of women-headed households has seen a drastic increase in recent years due to the migration of men to other areas in search of work.

Polygamy is widely practiced, although a law requiring the husband to provide equally for each wife has reduced its occurrence. The cost of paying more than one bride price and maintaining several households is high.

Traditional inheritance laws stipulate that a man's inheritance goes to his family upon his demise, but this rarely takes place in practice. Other members of the man's family usually take over the inheritance.

Swazi society places a lot of importance on fertility. Childless women often find themselves facing severe social stigma.

Upon divorce, a woman accused of adultery or similar misdemeanors is required to return the bride price to the groom. Generally the father or his family holds the rights to the custody of children after divorce.

Health

Swaziland's mediocre healthcare system has had a negative impact on women, particularly rural and pregnant women. Distance constraints and transportation costs further impede women's access to healthcare.

The estimated maternal mortality rate is a staggering 370 deaths per 100,000 live births. The infant mortality rate is also quite high, at 71.85 deaths per 1,000 live births.

The Swazi government has initiated family planning programs that offer family planning services at all its service delivery centers and mobile units. Swazi women, however, rarely use contraceptives due to cultural taboos and the fear of side effects. Customary laws require women to get the permission of their husbands or a senior male family member to make healthcare decisions.

Interesting Social Customs

Hundreds of Swazi women congregate to participate in a yearly festival known as the *Umhlanga* (reed-dance festival). After honoring the Queen Mother, a huge number of eligible women dance bare-breasted for the king. Ostensibly a ritual designed to knit the country's people closer together, this dance has a tradition of being a showcase from which the king chooses potential wives.

Women in Business

General View

Swazi women are legally regarded as minors in a country dominated by patriarchal attitudes. Their independence is severely limited in all respects and made worse by the lack of laws to protect or uplift them. Women require permission from their male relatives to open a bank account, purchase property, enter into a contract, obtain a passport, or leave the country.

The last few years have seen some improvement in women's empowerment. Men have died of AIDS in large numbers, and many others have left the country in search of employment. About 40 percent of households are headed by women, half of them by women whose husbands have left home for work. This has forced women to become more independent and to set up their own businesses for survival, as they are not eligible to inherit property after the husband's death. Almost 25 percent of Swazi women are now wage-earning members of the labor force, and a large number have made significant contributions to the country's economy through their small and medium-scale enterprises.

Legal Rights

Swazi women received the right to vote and to run for office in 1968. The law discriminates against them in matters of inheritance, property rights, and even nationality. As women cannot have property in their name (or even in partnership with their husbands), they must register property in the name of a male family member, who then has all rights over it. However, women have found a way around this by registering their properties under the name of corporations they have established.

The law proposes equal pay for equal work, but this does not happen in practice. In spite of significant wage differences in technical and professional jobs, women earn as much or more than men in clerical, managerial/administrative, skilled, and semi-skilled jobs. Overall, women earn 61 percent of what men earn.

Women in Professions

Swazi women have traditionally been occupied in agriculture-based activities. Better educational standards have enabled women to seek employment in professional and even technical sectors on a par with men. Today, women compose 61 percent of all technical and

professional workers, 24 percent of managers and administrators, 13 percent of semi-skilled laborers, and 3 percent of unskilled laborers. Their participation in politics is also increasing, with women holding about 11 percent and 30 percent of the seats in the lower and upper houses of Parliament respectively.

Many women head small and medium-sized companies, although there are none heading a major company. A couple of prominent Swazi women are Musa Fakudze, principal secretary at the finance ministry and the third-ranking financial official in the public sector, and Doo Mary-Joyce Aphane, the national co-coordinator for the women's legal advocacy group Women in Law of Southern Africa.

Women are not allowed to work in underground mines. Workplace attire is generally conservative. Short skirts and revealing dresses are not accepted.

Women are primarily responsible for taking care of their children, but with more women entering the workplace, many of them have to depend on childcare centers to look after their children. SINAN, a national network of infant and childcare organizations, encourages breast-feeding and child nutrition among working mothers.

Women as Business Owners

There are several non-governmental organizations and development groups like the Swaziland Investment Promotion Authority that are bringing in foreign investment and involving more women in business activities. Reforms in land policies have enabled women to set up agro-based businesses on a large scale.

Because of the lack of capital and legal support, most women-owned businesses are micro-, small-, or medium-scale. Women stick to traditional businesses like beauty salons, general stores, dressmaking, poultry farming, or clothing boutiques. Real estate, public relations, law, and education are some of the newer areas women entrepreneurs are entering.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign women visiting Swaziland on business should respect the country's customs and traditions. They may face some social resistance due to the lower status of women in the country. To avoid unwanted attention, they should dress in conservative clothing.

Sweden

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Sweden is one of the pioneers in gender equality. Swedish women's strong position with respect to education, employment, healthcare, and legal rights is supported by extensive legislation, a strong economy, and the liberal attitudes of Swedish society.

The immense support women receive from the government includes free higher education, free medical care, generous parental leave, and subsidized childcare facilities. Socially, women's autonomy is supported by later marriages, a decreased emphasis on motherhood, and trends toward a smaller family size (Sweden has the world's lowest recorded household size at 2.1 people per household). Women face few, if any, other social impediments.

The percentage of working women in the total labor force is among the highest in the world at 48 percent. The percentage of women in formal employment is 74, as compared to 79 percent for men. Women are also well-represented in professional sectors like medicine and law. The proportion of firms owned by women has also doubled in the 1990s to 30 percent.

There are differences between women belonging to different socio-economic classes in that women from economically stronger families are more likely to pursue higher education and be more career-oriented. Rural women and women from some ethnic communities have traditionally been less professionally successful than their urban counterparts, but this is changing.

Sweden's proportion of female parliamentarians and ministers is a world record at 45 percent and 50 percent respectively. Representation in standing committees, which are an important part of the Swedish political structure, is also very high at 44 percent.

There are no dress code restrictions for Swedish women, who dress in modern European-style clothing.

Legal Rights

Legislation framed over the years has given women rights to inheritance, suffrage (granted for some local elections in the 1860s and applied nationally in 1919), citizenship, reproduction, abortion, and separate tax assessment. They are also guaranteed protection from domestic violence, gender discrimination in employment, and the purchase of sexual services.

Sweden has an efficient set of laws that govern against discrimination on any ground. This is strictly monitored by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman. Although equal pay for equal work is one of the chief components of the Gender Equality Act, there is some disparity in the wages of men and women because of the difference in the sectors and jobs in which they are employed. There are also some differences in pensions.

Women can undergo an abortion until the 18th week of pregnancy by request. A special permission is required to

have an abortion after this point. Family planning is at the discretion of women.

Women can initiate divorce under the Marriage Code of 1987. Both spouses have equal right to the property after the divorce. They receive joint custody over the children and are responsible for their maintenance until the children are 18 or married.

Education

All Swedes are eligible to receive nine years of free coeducational schooling. Literacy rates are 99 percent for both men and women. The curriculum in schools has been changed to eliminate any gender bias with "feminine" or "masculine" subjects. In terms of higher education, women represent about 60 percent of all undergraduate students and 40 percent of graduate students.

Women have equal access to all sectors for employment, including the armed forces as per the Equal Opportunities Act. All employees are covered by legislation on wage conditions, work safety, pensions, maternity/paternity leave, and training opportunities. Entrepreneurship is also being encouraged among women.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Swedes marry by their own choice, irrespective of family approval. Young people meet at educational institutions and workplaces or socially through friends in bars or other public places.

The legal marriageable age is 18, but younger people younger can marry by special permission. The average marriage age among women is increasing.

Swedes marry relatively late in life (at about 30 years of age for women and 32 for men), and co-habitation has replaced marriage to a great extent in recent years. Since 1995, Sweden has allowed gays and lesbians to register their relationship under domestic partnership laws.

Polygamy is illegal in Sweden. Polygamous marriages that take place outside Sweden are recognized in Sweden, however.

Women need not take the spouse's surname after marriage. If they do so, they need to inform the marriage registrar. They can, however, use it as a middle name.

Under the Swedish Marriage Act, both partners in a marriage are equally responsible for finances as well as household chores. Women can own and manage separate assets. Marital assets that belong to both spouses are divided equally in case of divorce.

Women have equal rights to initiate divorce proceedings. Divorce is preceded by a mandatory "reconsideration" period. Spouses have joint custody of children in the event of divorce. The court can, however, terminate joint custody upon the request of one spouse. The partners are responsible for their own maintenance after the divorce except under some conditions.

Health

Swedes are protected by the Health and Medical Services Act of 1982, which guarantees access to good quality health services for all. Mothers and children receive some free healthcare services like obstetric care. Women have reproductive rights to decide about the number of children and the spacing between them.

The infant mortality rate in Sweden is 3 per 1,000 live births, while the life expectancy for women is around 82 years. These impressive statistics reinforce the fact that Swedish women enjoy one of the highest qualities of life in the world.

Interesting Social Customs

Sweden (along with Finland) has a peculiar custom where parents send girls to gather a bouquet of seven or nine flowers, alone and in total silence. According to tradition, the girls will dream of their future husbands if they place the bouquet under their pillows.

Women in Business

General View

Comprehensive childcare programs, an active feminist movement, and a high percentage of women in the government make Sweden a world leader in gender equality. Sweden has the world's highest proportion of women in the labor force at 48 percent, and women are broadly represented in business, the professions, and the public sector.

Legal Rights

Women in Sweden were given the right to vote in 1921, and more women than men exercise this right. Women can own property and start a business. They have equal rights to inheritance, and the law guarantees an equal share among the claimants.

The Swedish government's gender equality policy aims at providing the same opportunities, rights, and rargensibilities for women and men in all spheres of life. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsman is responsible for monitoring compliance with the various laws that grant equal rights and equal pay and that prohibit discrimination and sexual harassment.

Women in Professions

Many women find employment in "traditional" segments like childcare, elder-care, nursing, light industrial jobs, and office work. Seventy-five percent of Swedish women work in the public sector compared to twenty-five percent of men.

Some prominent Swedish woman leaders include: Christina Stenbeck, manager of Kinnevik, which owns several media, telecom, forestry, and finance companies; Antonia Johnsson, owner of Axfood Axel Johnson AB and Nordstjernan, whose three daughters, Alexandra Mörner, Caroline Mörner Berg, and Sofe Mörner, also work for her companies; Selma Olsson, a medical doctor and board member of Stennagrupen, a family-run shipping and real estate empire; and Annika Bootsman Kleberg, co-owner of Walleniusrederierna, one of the large shipping companies in the world.

Despite Swedish women's relatively strong position in Parliament, men still dominate nearly all decision-making bodies. Women are under-represented in senior management positions in the private sector, and very few women serve as corporate CEOs. To ensure equal gender balance in the private sector, the government has focused attention on the representation of women and men on the boards of major private companies and started a Business Leadership Academy to help women managers develop their management skills.

Public funding is available for childcare, and parents have a wide range of options: day-care centers, part-time children's groups, drop-in preschool activity centers, and private childcare.

Women as Business Owners

Women run 22 percent of all enterprises in Sweden. Women-owned enterprises are mostly in the service sector, followed by the trade sector, and finally the manufacturing sector. The most common enterprise in Sweden is the sole proprietorship, and 72 percent of female-owned businesses fall into this category.

Traditionally, Swedish entrepreneurs had lower levels of education, but the number of entrepreneurs (male and female) with a tertiary education increased in the mid-1990s. Now there are more self-employed women with college degrees than there are men in the same category.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen will find Sweden a welcoming business atmosphere. Swedes like informality in their business relationships, but private and business lives are kept very separate. Swedes value their personal space and dislike physical contact. The Swedes are generally frank and straightforward in their communication and dislike interruptions during meetings. Swedes are very meticulous and respect precision and honesty.

Switzerland

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Compared to other European countries, advances toward gender equality in Switzerland are a quite recent phenomenon. Switzerland is essentially a male-dominated society in which either the father or the husband assumes a dominant role. Women are treated politely, but their responsibilities are restricted mainly to household duties and they have comparatively fewer educational and employment options.

The advent of feminist movements led to a dramatic increase in the number of women taking up various professions and, in recent years, the Swiss government has implemented laws promoting gender equality. Although the impact of these trends on the treatment of women in the country has yet to be felt, an increasing number of Swiss women are more actively participating in public life.

In politics, women make up 26 percent of the National Council and 24 percent of the Council of States. There are quite a few women who work as judges and lawyers. In the medical field, a large percentage of nurses are women. Many women are involved in the country's business sector as well.

Women in rural areas have access to fewer job opportunities compared to their urban counterparts. Rural women work mainly in farms, and the percentage of self-employed female farmers is just three percent.

Switzerland is home to quite a few religious and ethnic groups. The position of women in each of these groups varies according to their own individual customs and practices, but it's safe to say that people in the ethnically Italian area around Lucerne/Lugano, where many immigrants have settled, do not have as much support as those in the ethnically German and more affluent areas of the country.

Swiss women do not face any particular dress code restrictions, although Islamic women are not allowed to wear headscarves to work in some cantons.

Legal Rights

Switzerland's Constitution provides women with all the same rights that men enjoy. In practice, though, gender discrimination is widespread.

The Swiss gave women the right to vote in 1971, one of the last European countries to do so. Women are allowed to drive cars and have the right to own and inherit property.

Domestic violence against women is widespread in Switzerland, with about one in eight, or 13 percent, of all Swiss women suffering from physical and sexual abuse. Swiss women have the right to initiate divorce and the right to claim custody of their children in case of a divorce.

Abortions are legal in Switzerland when performed within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Education

Women in Switzerland have equal access to the coeducational school system, and 100 percent of Swiss girls enroll in primary school. A large number of girls go on to complete their secondary and tertiary levels of education, with women comprising 45 percent of the country's university students. The literacy rate for women and men is the same, at 99.4 percent.

In spite of their high education levels, Swiss women are not assured of equal job opportunities. Only 59 percent of the country's women hold paying jobs (lower than most of Europe), and they only earn 72 percent as much as men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Women are free to choose their own spouses, although there is pressure on them to choose men from the same social class. Dating is widely prevalent in Swiss society and is culturally permissible. Women usually start dating in their teens. The most common places for meeting men include educational institutions, parties, and social events.

The average age at which Swiss women marry is 28. A woman usually assumes her father-in-law's last name upon marriage, although some women add their husband's surname to their own. Special authorization is necessary if the couple wishes to use the wife's name.

According to Swiss laws, women have the right to hold assets separately from their husbands. In practice, however, men have control over the property and assets that belong to their wives. Men and women shoulder family responsibilities equally, but it is women who perform the domestic chores.

There is no social stigma attached to childless Swiss women. In fact, many women prefer to remain childless in order to focus on their careers.

In a divorce, women have equal rights to a share in the joint property of the couple. In the case of cohabitation, if parents separate, the mother is the legal custodian of her children even if paternity is proved. In divorce cases, the court decides the legal guardian or approves of joint custodianship if solicited. If the legal custodian is a foreigner, he or she can return to his or her country with their ward.

Health

Women have equal access to Switzerland's healthcare facilities. Women working in public sector concerns and some other companies are in a position to qualify themselves for maternity leave along with salary benefits under stipulated criteria.

The standards of Swiss medical care are thought to be one of the best in the world. The maternal mortality rate is about 6 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is 4 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Women are permitted to make their own healthcare decisions, although the permission of the spouse or father is necessary in certain situations. Contraceptives are easily available in Switzerland, and statistics indicate that more than 82 percent of all Swiss women use some form of birth control.

Interesting Social Customs

Under Swiss tradition, a bride-to-be wears a crown or a floral wreath as a symbol of her maidenhood. Once the marriage is solemnized, the wreath is burned and if the wreath burns quickly, people regard the woman to be fortunate. Newlywed Swiss couples usually plant a pine sapling in the hope of bearing children soon.

Women in Business

General View

As in other small, affluent European countries, only about two-thirds of Swiss women actively participate in the country's economy. Many women choose part-time career options or small-scale business projects that don't interfere with their domestic lives. The country's social conservatism is encapsulated in the popular description of women's role in society as revolving around "*kinder, kirche, und kuche*" (children, church and kitchen), and this perception tends to discourage women from seeking employment or financial independence.

The Swiss government and its Federal Commission for Women's Issues are initiating substantive measures to make up for past discrimination by creating more work opportunities for women in the mainstream economy. There are also a few women's organizations involved in safeguarding the rights of Swiss businesswomen.

Legal Rights

Swiss laws guarantee equal rights for women. In reality, however, women are discriminated against in various ways. Swiss women were one of the last groups of women to be given the right to vote in Europe (in 1971). They have legal rights to own businesses and to own as well as inherit property.

There is a substantial gap in the salaries of Swiss men and women. Studies show that, overall, women earn 28 percent less than their male counterparts for performing the same job. For women in the age group of 45 and above, the disparity is 35 percent. Gender-based salary disparities are more pronounced in the private sector than in the public sector.

Women in Professions

Swiss women take up a wide variety of jobs. Traditionally popular jobs include baking, confectionery, nursing, teaching, jobs in the service sector, and secretarial work. Many women in Eastern Switzerland engage in embroidery work.

It is not very easy for Swiss women to break into upper management. Although 44 percent of university graduates are women, the percentage of women in leadership roles is far lower. Eighteen percent of Switzerland's women work as middle-level employees, while only three percent have found their way to top decision-making positions.

Famous Swiss businesswomen include: Peggy Bruzelius, director of Syngenta International AG, an international agriculture business; Gisèle Rufer, head of Delance, a company that manufactures exclusive timepieces; and Marta Jarach, the owner of Database Solutions, an information technology company.

The Swiss government does not provide any state-sponsored childcare, so working Swiss mothers often rely on private daycare centers and kindergartens.

Women as Business Owners

Swiss women account for 37 percent of the new business ventures started in Switzerland. The vast majority of businesses started by women are micro- or small-sized, often with less than five employees. They usually focus on consultancy, information technology, the real estate business, trade, and the service sector, although women own businesses in almost all commercial sectors.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen, especially those with creative ideas, can expect to be treated with respect in Switzerland. Since the title "Ms." has no French or German equivalent, be prepared to be addressed as *Frau* (Mrs.), irrespective of whether you are married or not.

Men wait for women to offer their hands first during mutual greeting. Swiss men will almost always refuse to allow a woman to pay for a meal. Attire should be conservative.

Syria

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditionally, Syrian women have had no identity of their own apart from their roles as the dependents of the men in their families. Women in towns were restricted to the role of homemaker, while rural women had the dual responsibility of household work and unpaid farm labor. The ruling Ba'ath party has adopted a policy of women's emancipation and legal equality, but traditional gender discrimination persists. The government's Moral Intelligence Department, which investigates female applicants for federal jobs, is a compelling case in point.

Rural women and those belonging to the lower socio-economic classes lack the professional opportunities available to urban women. Many of them are forced by their families to discontinue their education and perform unpaid domestic work.

Legally, women have the right to vote and stand for election, but the number of women who run for office is insignificant compared to men. Women are also represented in the law, armed forces, and police. Women are underrepresented in Syrian media's decision-making positions, although there are many women journalists, scriptwriters, and talk show hosts. More than half of the businesswomen in Syria are entrepreneurs who have established their own businesses.

The status of Syrian women has improved in some areas like education, health, and family planning. To comply with the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the government initiated a project to rewrite school textbooks to emphasize the equality of women. Television dramas also focus more now on women's problems such as divorce and domestic violence and portray more positive images of women.

Dress codes are diverse among the country's different tribes and villages. The young educated upper class prefers Western attire. Revealing dresses are usually avoided. Traditionally, wealthy women wear long robes with veils.

Legal Rights

The Syrian Constitution grants equal rights to women and strives to promote women's participation in all spheres of Syrian life. Women have the general rights to vote, to run for public office, and to drive vehicles. There are no specific laws to protect women against gender discrimination, however. The Islamic *Shari'a* court administers family law cases for Syrian citizens, and some of its provisions are grossly unfair to women, particularly those concerning personal status, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. For instance, women are not legal guardians of their children and lose custody of their children in the event of remarriage, while the same does not apply to men who remarry.

According to a U.N. survey, Syrian women are subjected to domestic violence and have no legal provisions to protect them. Women can seek divorce, but the legal

procedure is inordinately long and cumbersome. Abortion is illegal and criminal under the penal code. Self-induced or clandestine abortions endanger a large number of lives every year.

Education

The government provides free, public education from primary school through university. Women's literacy rate is 75 percent, compared to the male rate of 91 percent. Gender differentials in pay are insignificant. Syria's primary and secondary schools are single-sex institutions, while universities are coeducational. Women who receive university degrees in medicine, law, engineering, and the humanities find employment at the same rates as men and are compensated according to their qualifications.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Marriages are arranged by families in accordance with Muslim tradition. A slight degree of freedom to choose one's spouse is now allowed in cities and among the upper classes. Still, the choice remains restricted to cousins and close family friends. A Muslim engagement, recorded in writing, allows a couple to court. Dating is common among college students and more Westernized people.

The minimum age for marriage is 18 years for males and 16 years for girls. People below the legal age can marry with the permission of the court. As in Iran, Yemen, and Jordan, women in Syria do not take their husband's names after marriage.

Even though polygamy is legally banned, it is not entirely abolished, and Islamic clerics have the discretion to allow such marriages. The Islamic *Shari'a* codes of personal conduct assume the dependence of women on their fathers and husbands and severely discriminate against them. The Islamic codes sometimes deprive women of their property rights, in spite of assurances in the civil laws to the contrary.

Traditional roles regard wives as responsible for running the household while men have the ultimate decision-making power. Childlessness is stigmatized in Syrian society, and women are under pressure to beget male children.

In case of divorce, courts generally grant custody to mothers until children are 14 years old. Women sometimes, however, have to make financial concessions to their husbands in order to get custody.

Health

Primary health care is freely accessible to all Syrians through public health clinics. A good percentage of both urban and rural women deliver babies under the care of trained medical staff, and this is reflected in the low infant mortality rate of 16 per 1,000 live births.

Women also have access to family planning clinics, and many married women use contraceptives. Women need the consent of their husbands in order to make healthcare decisions.

Women in Business

General View

Traditionally, Syrian women were homemakers, and their activity outside the home was restricted to agriculture, where they had a disproportionately high burden of unpaid labor. The lack of reliable statistics on women makes it difficult to assess women's current rate of participation in some areas, but overall, some 27 percent of women are employed. Syrian women's unemployment rate is high at over 24 percent, and only one percent of employed women hold administrative or managerial positions.

The philosophy of the ruling Ba'athist party included the emancipation and equal treatment of women, and in 2003 the government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, with certain reservations. In spite of these developments, women are denied many basic legal and social rights and continue to remain legal dependents of their male relatives.

Today, the status of Syrian women has improved a bit and Syrian women are somewhat better represented in government, engineering, and economics.

Legal Rights

The Syrian Constitution grants women all the rights that make it possible for them to participate fully in political, social, and economic life. Although state policy is nominally aimed at promoting women's development, there are no laws to protect women against gender discrimination and no official provisions by which women can seek redress.

Syrian women have the right to vote, but very few run for office as social mores discourage women in public life. They also have the right to drive. They can own and use housing, but the prevailing social custom prevents women from living alone. The Syrian government claims that women must get the same pay as men for doing the same work, but it is unlikely that this is truly the case.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, women worked in agriculture, carpet weaving, and cattle and sheep rearing. Nowadays, some women also work in metal or electrical workshops or are engaged in piecework in their homes. Educated Syrian women are primarily employed in medicine and teaching.

While there is no legal restriction that prevents women from working outside the home, the traditional status of women as inferior to men pervades all areas of business. Despite this, the list of successful entrepreneurs in Syrian trade and business includes Lina Safwan Ashrafieh, who owns a pharmaceutical company; Mavada Adian Al Hadid, a diploma holder in business management involved in fashion design and trading; and Jina AlMoufti, owner of a company that makes hand-made embroidery.

Syrian women are prohibited from working in certain jobs considered dangerous or immoral. There are no specific dress codes at the workplace, but shorts, mini skirts, and sleeveless shirts are generally frowned upon.

The government provides national childcare at subsidized rates in schools and work centers. Syrian women also enjoy the benefit of a large number of nurseries and kindergartens, particularly in areas with high female employment.

Women as Business Owners

Very few women own their own businesses. Out of a total of 767 Syrian businesswomen, a little more than half of them are self-made entrepreneurs. Embroidery is one of the traditional crafts of Syrian women that have been incorporated as micro-enterprises.

Rural women have a tougher time than urban women in starting businesses. Less than 5 percent of agricultural land is women-owned and rural women suffer from poor access to credit facilities without collateral. The government, in conjunction with the UN Relief and Works Agency, provides micro-enterprise loans at reduced rates to women. Female entrepreneurs in Syria need better marketing outlets and more training.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Local businessmen are generally very polite, particularly with foreigners, and attach a lot of importance to official titles. Business meals are an integral part of building a relationship, and Syrian hospitality is famous for its elaborate meals that last for hours. Social interaction is an important aspect of Syrian culture; foreign visitors who are skilled conversationists are likely to build a good rapport with their Syrian counterparts. That said, Syria has a high level of corruption, and foreign businesswomen need to exercise caution in order to avoid problems.

Female visitors are generally expected to dress modestly in loose-fitting apparel with high necklines and long sleeves.

Taiwan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Taiwanese women have a long history of subordinating their needs to those of their extended families. As the Taiwanese economy continues to grow and diversify from its roots in manufacturing (traditionally driven by female workers), however, women are finding more independence and financial stability.

Over 47 percent of Taiwanese women were employed in 2004, and this percentage is still increasing. The percentage of women in the labor force with college degrees is small (14 percent in 1997), but has been increasing rapidly. The rising divorce rate in Taiwan is another important indicator of the changing role of women in society and family.

Women still are solely responsible for taking care of the home and children, whether or not they have a job. These responsibilities make obtaining positions of authority more difficult. The women's movement has gained momentum, and they provide direct services, lobby for legislation, and create public awareness of their activity through mass media.

The percentage of women in government and politics is the highest in Asia (at 22 percent of Parliament) and participation is on the rise. In 2000, Taiwan elected its first woman vice president and nine women members of the Cabinet, including the Minister of Interior and the Chairperson of the Mainland Affairs Council. Women hold about 20 percent of civil service management positions.

Women are not that well represented in law and business. They make up 15 percent of all managers and CEOs, but women-owned enterprises contribute 20 percent to the country's economy.

Women have no dress code restrictions except that they are required to dress conservatively in the workplace.

Legal Rights

According to the Constitution of Taiwan, all citizens are equal before the law. Women received the right to vote in 1947. They also have the right to own and inherit property, although patrilineal customs ensure that land is passed to male heirs and a woman's inheritance is limited to the dowry that she received at the time of her marriage.

The Taiwanese Constitution provides for legal equality of men and women; however, many policies, practices, and institutions will need to change before true parity can be achieved. The passage of the Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Act, for instance, is aimed at reducing domestic violence, which has long been tolerated in Taiwanese society. The Gender Equality in Employment Law is also intended to protect women from discrimination in employment.

Taiwanese women do not have a constitutional right to abortion and can terminate pregnancy only under certain conditions specified by law.

Taiwanese women are increasingly initiating divorce, and their divorce rates are among the highest in Asia, one indication of their changing roles and their increased level of employment.

Education

Taiwanese men and women have equal access to education. At the primary and secondary levels, the enrollment ratio of females is slightly higher than that of males. There are more men than women at vocational remedial schools. Female enrollment at open universities is high, but there are fewer women in postgraduate and doctoral programs. The literacy rate for women is 95 percent versus 97 percent for men.

Most female students enroll in programs in education, the arts, humanities, home economics, tourism, and mass communications. Their enrollment rates are low in areas such as engineering, natural sciences, mathematics, computer science, technology, and the law. All academic institutions in Taiwan are co-educational.

Although gender pay differentials are quite significant, with women in the in non-agricultural sectors earning about three-quarters of what men earn, the disparities are significantly lower in positions that require higher education.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, matchmakers arranged marriages, and the bride and groom met for the first time, most often, on the wedding day. Young men and women today have more freedom to choose their partners, although they still need parental approval and the mediation of a matchmaker in traditional families. The younger generation prefers dating and romance. Youngsters meet at parties, bars, nightclubs, and workplaces, or through mutual friends and family. Women generally marry when they are about 26.

Taiwanese women are no longer required to take their husband's name after marriage. A woman with a foreign spouse can transmit citizenship to her children. Polygamy is illegal in Taiwan, but a common-law type of polygamy is practiced by some, especially the wealthy.

Women run the household in Taiwan, but when it comes to decision making, men usually have the upper hand. The husband owns all property at the time of marriage as well as property acquired during the marriage, and the wife only has rights over property inherited by her or given to her.

Taiwan is a place where women were once valued for their ability to beget a male heir and where female infanticide was practiced. For today's modern women, however, childlessness is not a big issue.

In case of divorce, cultural and social circumstances influence the judges' decision to award custody on the basis of the best interests of the child. Recent laws are more favorable to mothers in matters pertaining to child custody.

Health

For a long time, unemployed women were denied health insurance. Women's health in general was neglected due to management problems in the medical system and ineffective birth control policy. The National Insurance system implemented in 1995 now offers equal health benefits for women.

While medical care is highly professionalized, women patients are often unaware of their options, resulting in high rates of Caesarian sections and hysterectomies. The infant mortality rate is low, at about six for every 1,000 live births. Taiwanese law requires that a woman obtain the consent of her husband for an abortion. Women make important health care decisions in consultation with their husbands. Women have access to birth control; IUDs are the most popular birth control method, followed by the condom and birth-control pills.

Interesting Social Customs

The house in which an expectant mother resides cannot have any construction or renovation done to it. Even using scissors to cut paper is believed to harm the unborn child, and perhaps result in a missing limb.

Women in Business

General View

Women constitute the majority of workers in Taiwan's small and medium-sized industries, which make up the majority of businesses there. Nearly half of the female population has participated in the workforce at some point, although traditional rargensibilities for the home and children often affect women's careers.

Increasing educational levels and economic independence have increased women's influence in the Taiwanese economy, however. Access to technical and professional fields in particular have improved women's participation in decision-making positions of authority.

The government in Taiwan is also aggressively trying to promote business and investment opportunities for women. The number of self-employed women has increased steadily, and women entrepreneurs have become more successful than ever before.

Legal Rights

Taiwan granted women the right to vote in 1947. Women have the constitutional right to own businesses and inherit property; in reality, however, men inherit most property, especially land, which is considered a male birthright in their typically patrilineal society. Traditionally, women inherit property as a dowry at the time of their marriage.

The law prohibits gender discrimination, and The Gender Equality in the Workplace Act grants equal treatment in matters of employment opportunity, pay, and promotions. Statistics reveal that on average, women earn 85 percent of men's earnings for similar jobs.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, women were employed in clerical, service, and sales sectors and were under-represented in legislative, professional, managerial, and manual labor jobs. Gender stereotypes nowadays divide the labor force to a far lesser degree.

Some well-known Taiwanese women entrepreneurs are Huang Mee Lian, chairwoman of Ever Rich Holdings Co. Ltd.; Nita Ying, chairwoman of Taiwan High Speed Rail Corp.; and Morty Langslow, founder of Wako Express and co-founder of Linehaul Express.

The government provides financial assistance to low-income families for childcare and subsidies to local governments to promote child protection. In addition, the government aims to improve day-care facilities through training childcare personnel, providing childcare information, and improving nutritional standards at both public and private care centers.

Women as Business Owners

Ministry of Finance data reveals that women-owned enterprises in 2003 accounted for nearly 34 percent of the total enterprises in Taiwan. However, most of these tend to be micro-enterprises, and there is a notable lack of women-owned largenterprises. Total sales by women-owned businesses account for only 13 percent of all the country's revenues. Recent research indicates that newly launched women-owned enterprises continue to account for over one-third of the total number of new enterprises, and trends point to a substantial increase in the future.

The vast majority of women enterprises have low share capital and are concentrated in the service industry in both wholesale and retail services like personal services (hairdressers, beauticians and dressmakers), hotels, restaurants, garment trade, accounting and bookkeeping, and security brokerages. In the unskilled sector, women are self-employed as shop salespersons, demonstrators, housekeeping and restaurant service workers, street vendors, or other market salespersons.

According to statistics, women entrepreneurs initiate businesses between the ages of 20 to 30 and are more likely to have a higher educational level than their male counterparts. The increasing demand for micro-enterprise start-up loans indicates that the tide of young female entrepreneurs is likely to grow.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen find it easy to do business in Taiwan. Be aware, however, that agreements are often not viewed as seriously as they are elsewhere, and negotiations often continue after an agreement has been signed.

Entertaining is a prerequisite for establishing a good business rapport in Taiwan, but avoid discussing business at dinner unless the host initiates it.

Tajikistan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Under Soviet rule, Tajikistani women realized equal civil rights and actively participated in all areas of society. The transition to democracy and a free market economy, however, resulted in a resurgence of fundamentalist Islamic practices. These practices denied women the benefits they enjoyed under Soviet rule and increased the gender gaps in education and employment.

Traditional Tajik culture follows a patriarchal societal structure in which women are required to play a passive role. If they work, they are still expected to perform all domestic chores besides taking care of the children. Studies indicate that about two-thirds of Tajikistan's women are victims of domestic abuse, including sexual violence and emotional cruelty.

The socio-economic status of a woman determines her position in society. Women from the lower social and economic classes are forced by poverty to work in dangerous jobs for very low wages. They lack access to the most basic services such as education and healthcare. Women from the upper classes lead comparatively better lives.

The revival of Islamic practices has curtailed women's access to education, health, and job opportunities. On top of this, the government has chosen to stop maternity benefits and to close daycare centers as cost-cutting measures.

In politics, the 96-seat parliament has 16 women representatives. Tajikistani women constitute one-third of all judges in Tajikistan, eight of the 32 seats in the Supreme Court, and 17 percent of the lawyers in the country. A large number of Tajik women work in the medical sector as nurses and other healthcare personnel. Tajik women are visible mostly in the commerce and service sectors, and many run micro-sized businesses.

Rural women in Tajikistan work in collective farms and cotton fields. Legislation does not recognize their work, which makes them ineligible for the benefits enjoyed by women working in other sectors. Rural women are more prone to discriminatory attitudes and generally have to work long, hard hours besides having to take care of the household.

Ethnic minorities, such as the Tajik Roma, are marginalized and forced to live on handouts or by activities in the informal economy. The lives of women in these communities are particularly difficult.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for Tajik women. Western styles of dress are popular in urban areas.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan proclaims that all citizens have equal rights, and Tajikistan granted women the right to vote in 1924. They also have the right to drive cars. Tajik women usually do not inherit property from their parents, but, under civil law, a widow is entitled to a portion of her husband's property.

Women are allowed to have abortions until the twenty-eighth week of pregnancy under conditions such as the death of the husband during pregnancy, the imprisonment of the pregnant woman or her husband, pregnancy caused by rape, divorce during pregnancy, or when the number of children in a family exceeds five.

Under family law, women have the right to initiate divorce. Although parents have equal rights over children, in most divorce cases, the custody of the children goes to the mother.

Education

According to the Constitution, women have equal access to education. The law has made basic education, which consists of nine years of schooling, mandatory for both boys and girls. Girls and boys share the same classroom space in Tajikistan.

Almost all Tajik girls complete their primary levels of education, but studies indicate that a gender gap is beginning to develop in favor of the boys at the secondary level of education. The incidence of dropouts is higher in the urban areas. The literacy rate for Tajik women is 99 percent as compared to 100 percent for men.

Generally women do not have the same job opportunities as men, and they seldom hold high managerial posts. In rural areas, husbands restrict their wives from studying or working outside.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally Tajikistani parents arrange marriages with the help of a matchmaker. Tajikistan's culture does not approve of dating and discourages men from meeting women, except at social functions.

The legal minimum age of marriage for Tajik women has been reduced to sixteen. Although legally prohibited, polygamy is accepted by the society, and polygamous marriages have become common since independence.

After marriage, spouses can take either surname as a common name for their family, retain their own surnames, or combine both surnames. This means that a woman's surname does not necessarily denote her marital status.

Tajikistan's male-dominated society regards man as the head of the household and as someone who has control over his wife and the family. Women are expected to take care of all domestic work and childrearing.

Tajikistani culture views childlessness as a misfortune and considers infertility a valid reason for divorce. Upon divorce, both parents have equal rights over the custody of children. In most cases, however, women receive custody. Fathers are required by law to pay alimony.

Health

Tajikistan's women have unequal access to the health care system. The inadequate medical facilities, shortage of health centers, and migration of many professionals from the country have resulted in poor health conditions for women.

Studies indicate that urban areas have one doctor per 255 women, and rural areas have one doctor per 491 women. About 70 percent of all births in Tajikistan take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. The country's maternal mortality rate is 40 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is about 91 deaths per 1,000 live births.

The culture of male dominance discourages women from making their own healthcare decisions. Tajikistan's culture does not approve of family planning, considering it counter to their religious principles. Because of the lack of awareness and availability of contraceptives, just 34 percent of women use contraception.

Interesting Social Customs

In Tajikistan a "cradle ceremony" is held when a baby is forty days old. This ceremony includes a coming-of-age ritual for the mother, whereby she is considered to have become a complete woman after giving birth to a child.

Recently, a top Islamic association in Tajikistan has forbidden women from entering mosques, since it involves an integration of the sexes.

Women in Business

General View

During Russian rule, the emancipation and education of Tajik women was a top priority. After independence, however, the shift to the free market economy adversely affected women, and large numbers became unemployed or earned barely enough to support their families.

These days women are found throughout the Tajikistan economy in government, academic institutions, and private enterprise, particularly in urban areas. In rural areas, however, the situation is completely different. Rural women marry young, have large families, and rarely receive a university education. Rural women are less likely to work outside the home.

Legal Rights

Tajik women have the same legal rights as men. Women won the right to vote in 1924. They have the right to own businesses and property. In the case of inheritance, the family property is traditionally bequeathed to the youngest son. Women cannot inherit land from their fathers. The Civil Code entitles widows to a share of their husband's land and property.

The wage gap between men and women is high in Tajikistan, with the average pay of a woman about two-thirds of what a man would earn for the same job.

Women in Professions

Tajik women commonly work in the agriculture and service sectors or as nurses, teachers, government workers, and makers of handicrafts.

Prior to independence, women were not represented in key leadership positions, and this is still the case. However, there are a few well-known Tajik female entrepreneurs, including Iuldasheva Rano Tolibovna, the head of Anor, a medium-sized enterprise; Halikova Kimie Nasrullaevna, owner of the a Valima restaurant; Iinoiatova Mavliuda Ahmedovna, an entrepreneur who is involved in

air transportation, fuel services, tourism, and the NAFOSAT Movie and TV Center for Children and Youth.

Employers are forbidden from using women for heavy or underground work and for any jobs that require working under dangerous conditions.

After the civil war, the lack of funding forced the closure of many state-run childcare centers, nurseries, and kindergartens. However, there are still a few state-sponsored childcare centers available. Working women also rely on members of the extended family or private daycare centers for childcare.

Women as Business Owners

Most women entrepreneurs manage micro-businesses that focus on retail and catering activities. Rural women are usually engaged in trading agricultural products, reselling goods, folk crafts, and sewing. On average, about 20,000 patents are issued to women entrepreneurs in Tajikistan each year.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Tajikistan is a patriarchal society, and male domination is pervasive. However, foreign businesswomen will not find it difficult to conduct business in Tajikistan, provided they build a personal relationship with local businesspeople.

Email is not the best means of initial communication, because it may not reach the decisionmaker. While making appointments with government officials, avoid Monday mornings, Friday afternoons, and Islamic holidays.

Never reject offered food. Partake of at least a small portion, and apologize for not being able to eat. Tajiks gesticulate a lot when speaking. For instance, putting one's hand to the chest is a sign of respect, welcome, or agreement. Certain gestures such as putting the index finger to the forehead or to the side of the forehead are considered rude.

Tajik business people are very hospitable and usually invite their associates "for a cup of tea," which usually means a full course dinner with vodka, cognac, and Tajiki poetry.

Tanzania

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Tanzanian society is male-dominated, and discrimination against women persists in employment, divorce, inheritance, and property ownership. Despite the government's claims of equal rights for women in society, many laws actually impede their ability to exercise these rights.

Urban women have made some advances with respect to women's rights, but strong traditional norms relegate rural women to submissive roles with little or no opportunity for paid employment. Women in the Muslim-dominated area of Zanzibar generally fare worse than their mainland counterparts.

The role and perception of women is going through ferment these days. The effects of widespread AIDS, alcohol abuse, and consumerism have been disruptive to traditional societal attitudes. Women (and men) are increasingly and stridently challenging the traditional roles assigned them by a male-dominated society.

Women have been traditionally underrepresented in Parliament and the judiciary, but they are making major gains. In Parliament, women won over 30 percent of the seats in 2005. In 2006, there were 7 women in the cabinet of 29 ministers and 10 deputy ministers out of a total of 30. Thirty percent of High Court judges and 36 percent of primary court magistrates were women in 2006. In business, women own 43 percent of micro- and small enterprises and dominate the informal, micro-level sectors of food production, sewing, crafts, small-scale farming, and cooperative production.

Tanzanian women dress modestly, especially Muslim women in Zanzibar. Otherwise, there are no particular dress code restrictions for women.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of Tanzania generally guarantees gender equality and prohibits discrimination against women in all spheres of life. It does not, however, include any specific provisions to redress actual instances of gender discrimination. Moreover, the country's other legal systems (customary tribal law, Indian law, Islamic *Shari'a* law) all treat women as subordinate to men.

Tanzanian women have the rights to vote, drive vehicles, and own property. Inheritance laws, particularly the customary laws, favor men in general. In particular, these laws overlook widows and divorcees in matters of inheritance.

Abortion is illegal and punishable except in therapeutic cases. This has led to a high incidence of illegal abortions and an increased maternal mortality rate.

Women can initiate divorce proceedings on several grounds including irreconcilable differences, mental and physical cruelty, desertion, and many others. Unlike in many Islamic countries, a husband cannot automatically dissolve his Muslim marriage by verbally repudiating his

wife three times; this "triple *talaq*" only provides a ground for the courts to issue a divorce decree.

Education

Gender inequality in access to education is obvious in Tanzania. Although boys and girls attend the same schools, enrollment rates for girls are lower. Girls' enrollment rates decline further at higher levels of schooling. Women have a literacy rate of 67 percent versus 84 percent for men.

The gender disparities in education continue in employment, where more women than men occupy middle and lower level positions. Men hold the majority of top positions.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditional marriages arranged by the parents are becoming less common, particularly in urban settings. Patrilineal ethnic groups follow the practice of "bride price." Polygamy is allowed with the consent of the first wife, and a significant number of Muslim marriages are polygamous.

The legal age of marriage for women is 15 years. A married woman can decide whether or not to take her husband's name. Women are in charge of the households, while men are regarded as the providers and decision-makers. Childlessness has a stigma attached to it, and women who cannot beget sons are divorced in many cases.

Many Tanzanian women face problems in asserting property ownership rights because of the government's and the courts' appeasement of customary and Islamic laws.

In civil divorce cases, women may obtain child custody, which the court usually decides by considering the best interests of the child. As regards Muslim women, Islamic *Shari'a* laws apply with judicial review.

Health

The Ministry of Health dispenses healthcare through public and private healthcare centers. The number of government dispensaries and health centers has increased, but insufficient health budgets and lack of proper facilities and services are issues of concern for Tanzania's healthcare system.

In Tanzania, men make decisions regarding women's health, and many people lack access to affordable birth control methods. Only one-third of deliveries are assisted by skilled staff, and this accounts for the extremely high maternal mortality rate of 1,500 deaths per 100,000 live births and the proportionately high infant mortality of 100 for every 1,000 live births. Many rural women deliver at home due to lack of transportation or the indifference of healthcare workers. Only 22 percent of all women use some form of birth control, and 16 percent use modern contraceptives.

Interesting Social Customs

Mistreatment of widows is widespread in Tanzania. As recently as 1999, more than 500 widows were accused of witchery and stoned to death.

On the island of Zanzibar, unmarried women who become pregnant are subject to three years imprisonment.

Women in Business

General View

The majority of Tanzanian women live in abject poverty without formal employment. About 87 percent of rural women are subsistence farmers responsible for most of the production, storage, processing, and marketing of food in the country. In urban areas, many women are self-employed or earn extra money through small-scale food, trade, or service businesses.

As a step towards economic empowerment of women, the government enacted the Land Law and the Village Act in 1999 to grant women the same right as men to own clan or family land. The government, along with non-governmental organizations and international donor agencies, is also taking steps to educate the society on empowering women through property rights and business ownership. These agencies also have to overcome the deep-rooted beliefs that women are incapable of carrying out commercial activities.

Legal Rights

Tanzanian women obtained the right to vote in 1959. Women in Zanzibar and many parts of the mainland face discriminatory restrictions on inheritance and ownership of property. Although statutory law grants women rights in matters of inheritance, the legal system defers to customary laws and Islamic Shari'a practices, which are highly inequitable toward women.

The salary gap between women and men is not really significant in Tanzania. On average, Tanzanian women earn 90 percent of men's wages.

Women in Professions

Women's participation in businesses such as food production, sewing, crafts, small-scale farming, animal husbandry, and small-scale cooperative production tends to reflect their traditional roles. A United Nations Development Program report states that Tanzania has a fairly high number (49 percent) of female administrators and managers. Successful women in business include Susan Mashibe, a foreign-educated commercial pilot and aviation engineer who runs her own company; Rachel Kessi, the director of the Mawazo art gallery in Dar-es-Salaam; and Anna Mbattah, the owner of an Internet cafe in Dar-es-Salaam.

The employment law of Tanzania restricts the employment of women between the hours of 10p.m. and 6a.m. in any industrial undertaking and prohibits women employees from working in underground mines.

There are no specific dress code restrictions at workplaces, but in Zanzibar—where Muslims are predominant—women dress modestly in accordance with Muslim beliefs.

In urban areas, working women employ house girls or *ayahs* to assist with childcare. Sometimes the extended family also helps. Recently, 14 daycare centers were started in tea plantation estates for children aged two to eight years old.

Women as Business Owners

Women dominate the informal, micro-level, and low-growth sectors, which are very competitive. A report says that women own almost 43 percent of micro- and small enterprises, and husbands and wives co-own another 9 percent.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen will have no problems doing business in Tanzania. Tanzanians are not serious about signing contracts and papers, because they feel that their commitment is not limited by a piece of paper. An agreement made in the presence of those whom they respect most, such as a spouse, elders, or friends, has more credibility than an official document.

Eye contact in official conversation is important to establish a feeling of trust. The public display of affection, anger, or emotion is generally considered inappropriate. Conventionally, the right hand, not the left, is used to give or receive something. The traditional Swahili greeting *Jambo*, to which the reply is also *Jambo*, is the standard greeting.

Thailand

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The traditional Thai adage, "Women are the elephant's hind legs," illustrates women's important role but secondary status in Thai society. Whether they are considered the front legs or the back legs, there is no doubt that Thai women actively participate in the country's increasingly industrialized and diversified work force. In exchange for their contributions to the success of the Thai economy, Thai women have gained more access to higher education, health services, and employment. However, they still have a long way to go before achieving a substantive degree of equality with men.

Women have some representation in the lower levels of government, holding 10 percent of parliamentary seats, but they are seriously underrepresented at the higher levels. There is only one female minister out of 36, one female governor out of 76, and seven women out of 76 deputy governors.

Women also face obstacles in the professions. Thai medical colleges have limited the seats for women to 50 percent, which will do little to change the national ratio of one female doctor for every three male doctors. In the legal profession, women comprise only 19 percent of the judges and 12 percent of the attorneys. Women have found more success in business, especially in trade and marketing.

Women in the lower echelons of society do not enjoy the same opportunities and privileges as the women of the upper strata. Rural women are more likely to suffer from poverty, low levels of education, sexual abuse, and domestic violence than urban women. Many women in the sex industry are from rural backgrounds. In particular, women of the hill tribes that have not been formally recognized by the government suffer from exploitation and abuse.

There are no dress code restrictions for Thai women, who generally dress in modern European-style clothing.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of 1997 guarantees women equal rights and protects them against all discrimination, particularly in politics, but traditional prejudices and family responsibilities restrain many of them from public life. Thai women got the right to vote in 1933.

Women also have the right to inherit equally from their parents. According to widespread practice, the youngest daughter usually takes care of the parents in their old age and inherits the family home.

Domestic violence and sexual harassment are still prevalent and not adequately addressed in Thai law. The law prohibits abortion except when it endangers the life of the mother or when the pregnancy is caused by rape.

Although Thai women can initiate divorces, they have to show sufficient grounds like adultery, desertion, or domestic violence. Upon divorce, usually women receive the custody of children.

Education

Thai women have equal access to education. The government has made nine years of schooling mandatory. Women constitute more than half of the total enrollments in universities, surpassing men in higher education enrollment. The government now offers scholarships for girls in rural areas to decrease the number of dropouts.

Boys and girls share the same classroom space in co-educational institutions. The literacy rate for women is 90.5 percent, compared to 94.9 percent for men.

Many women with higher education still gravitate towards traditionally "feminine" jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

In Thailand, parents usually arrange marriages with the approval of the couples. Girls and boys start dating in their teens. Women meet men at workplaces, entertainment spots, and social settings.

The legal age for marriage for women is 17 years, and Thai women get married at an average age of 22. Polygamy does not have legal sanction in Thailand; however, wealthy Thai men may keep a "minor wife."

Thai women can keep their maiden names even after marriage. Although husbands are the heads of the households, wives have a significant influence over family matters. Women have rights to own assets separate from their husbands, but legal documentation requires the permission of both the spouses.

The aggrieved party in a divorce case can claim maintenance from the other spouse. Most Thais prefer to settle child custody, property settlements, and alimony payments through arbitration. In most cases, the court awards the custody of children to the mother.

Health

Thai women have equal access to healthcare services. Thailand's healthcare services include both private and public institutions, and the hospitals (especially in urban areas) are well equipped with staff and modern facilities.

Each district has a public hospital that gives high priority to maternity and infant care. This has reduced the infant mortality rate from 74 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1970 to 23 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2003. Both public and private sectors grant women paid maternity leave for 60 to 90 days.

Since Thai society gave women the right to make their own healthcare decisions, the fertility rate has fallen from 6.36 children per woman in the 1960s to two today. The increase in pre-marital sex has also led to more teenage pregnancies, unwed mothers, unsafe abortions, and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

According to surveys, 79 percent of adult women used contraceptives in 2000. While government has tried to increase contraceptive use among men, the burden of using contraception falls mostly on women.

Interesting Social Customs

Thai women usually eat very small mouthfuls of food to avoid spilling food. Women cannot enter certain areas of Buddhist temples and are not allowed to touch a monk, hand him anything, sit next to him, or sit higher than him.

Women in Business

General View

It is a curious fact that Thai women have dominated trade and commerce since before the modern era. At the end of the 1990s, an impressive 56 percent of Thai women were engaged in trade and marketing, surpassing other countries in Southeast Asia that have high economic involvement of women. Despite the mistaken perception of foreigners, especially Westerners, about Thailand's notorious sex-trade industry, only a tiny number of Thai women work in the commercial sex industry.

Women's increased access to higher education has led to a large number of Thai women in senior business positions, and they are poised to play a larger role in the rapidly growing Thai economy in the coming years.

Legal Rights

Thailand's Constitution guarantees women equal rights with men. The new Constitution of 1997 specifically focuses on the equality of women and safeguards their rights.

Thai women were granted the right to vote in 1933. All children, both sons and daughters, inherit equally. Traditionally, the last child takes care of the parents in their old age and inherits the family home. Women have full rights to own and run businesses.

According to law, Thai women are entitled to equal pay and benefits for equal work. However, the main reason Thai women earn so much less than men is that most of them work in low-paying jobs while men dominate the more highly paid positions.

Women in Professions

Thai women have flourished in trade and commerce, considered the traditional domain of women. A large number of women at present have gravitated towards the clerical, teaching, and nursing fields, and the number of Thai women in professional and technical jobs now exceeds that of women in administrative positions.

Despite their major contribution to the economy of the country, Thai women hold relatively few senior management positions. A few well-known businesswomen from Thailand are Patara Sila-On, the chairperson of SandP Syndicate Public Company Limited, the largest restaurant chain in Thailand; Khunying Sasima Srivikom, the chairwoman of Golden Land Property Development Public Company Limited, a leading real estate development company in Thailand; Supaluck Umpujh, the vice chairperson of The Mall Group Company Limited, a large group of shopping complexes in Thailand and one of the largest retail developers in Asia; and Chintana Daengdej, founder of Education Mall Co. Ltd., a chain of learning centers located in shopping complexes.

The laws forbid women from performing arduous and harmful work such as cleaning machinery or engines while in operation, working with circular saws, and working on high scaffolding. Laws also strictly prohibit

employing unmarried women below 18 years of age in nightclubs, dance halls, dancing schools, bars, or massage parlors.

Working mothers seek the help of extended family members, especially grandparents, for childcare. Costly private day-care centers outnumber state-owned childcare centers in Thailand.

Women as Business Owners

Thailand has the highest level of entrepreneurship among women in the world, and Thais anticipate a steady increase in the number of women entrepreneurs. Higher levels of education have enhanced their entrepreneurial activities and improved the overall growth outlook for Thai women. Financial support given by the Thai government through the People's Bank has augmented women's entrepreneurial activities.

Generally, Thai businesswomen are engaged in weaving baskets and textiles, trading and marketing, and the service industry (beauty parlors, traditional Thai massage parlors). Thai women often form small investment groups to finance their businesses.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Thais tend to treat foreign businesswomen and businessmen alike. Be sure to make business appointments in advance and detail a clear agenda for the meeting.

When invited to a Thai home, remember to remove your shoes outside the house. According to an old custom, you should not step on the threshold while entering a house. Women cannot enter certain places in temples, and they should never touch or come in contact with monks.

Togo

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In Togo, women are considered inferior to men. Men make all major decisions concerning the family, while women take care of the household. Most women in Togo are also engaged in farming activities. Discrimination against women is present in all areas of Togo's patriarchal society. Domestic violence against women, including physical assault and marital rape, is a serious problem. Togo's women are also subject to various discriminatory and sometimes violent cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, early and forced marriages, deaths over dowry disputes, and widowhood rituals.

The position of women in Togo does vary by social and economic class. Only women who belong to renowned or well-to-do families enjoy the same privileges as the men. Women from poor families lead hard, short lives.

Many non-governmental organizations dedicated to fighting for women's rights are active in Togo. The consistent efforts of these organizations have seen moves toward the abolition of widowhood rituals and female genital mutilation. The government has also initiated many measures to improve the status of women in society.

In Togo, women now account for 32 percent of the total members in the National Assembly. Two of the 21 ministers in the cabinet are women. In the judiciary, women constitute 33.3 percent of the advisors in the Supreme Court. One out of the nine members in the Supreme Judicial Council is a woman. Many Togolese women work as nurses. In the business sector, most women are engaged in small trade, with very few of them owning big businesses.

Women in rural areas have responsibility for household work and also contribute extensively to family farming activities. Their access to educational and healthcare facilities is limited. Although each ethnic group has its own social system and culture, the role of women in all these sub-cultures is nearly the same.

In Togo, there are no dress code restrictions for women. Women are expected to dress modestly and respect local customs.

Legal Rights

The Togolese Constitution proclaims all people equal before the law, irrespective of their gender. Togolese women have the right to vote and drive vehicles. If a woman is married under customary laws, she is barred from owning and inheriting land. Women married under civil laws, however, can own and inherit property. Rural women usually cannot inherit the ownership of the husband's property due to customary laws.

The government of Togo prohibits abortions unless it is done to save a woman's life.

Togolese women have the right to initiate divorce. In the event of a divorce, women have complete rights to claim custody of the children.

Education

The government of Togo guarantees equal rights to education for men and women. Most educational institutions are concentrated in the urban areas, leaving rural women with very limited access. In Togo, girls and boys study together in the same classrooms.

About 83 percent of all Togolese girls enroll in primary school. This ratio takes a sharp dip at the secondary level, with statistics indicating that only 22 percent of these girls go on to enroll in secondary school. The adult literacy rate for women in Togo is 38.9 percent, as compared to 68.7 percent for the men.

Educated women generally have better employment opportunities in governmental organizations. Discrimination is prevalent in the private sector, where the hiring is entirely at the discretion of the employer.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Although Togolese laws give women the right to accept or reject a marriage proposal, this seldom happens. Forced or arranged marriages are common in Togo. The practice of dating is neither socially or culturally permissible in Togo.

Togolese law prescribes the legal age for marriage to be 17 for women. In practice, however, early marriages are still common, with the brides sometimes as young as 12 or 14 years old.

Togolese law permits polygamy provided all wives are treated equally. This equality provision, however, is almost impossible to enforce.

Togolese society considers the man to be the head of the family while the woman cares for the household. According to Togolese law, a woman can own property separate from her spouse. An increasing number of Togolese women prefer to attach their husband's names to their own after marriage.

A childless woman is not respected and is often ill-treated in Togo, where motherhood is considered a woman's ultimate fulfillment.

In the event of a divorce under civil law, each spouse keeps his or her property, but in a divorce under customary law the husband inherits all the property. If a couple divorces, the mother is considered to be the natural guardian of the children until they reach the age of seven. After that, the court decides by considering the children's best interests. If the mother retains custody of the children, the father is required to pay alimony.

Health

In Togo, both men and women have equal access to health services. About 40 percent of the rural women do not receive proper medical care, either due to the distance involved or lack of coverage.

About 62 percent of all births in Togo take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. The country's maternal mortality rate is high, at about 560 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is 78 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Togolese women almost always make healthcare decisions in consultation with their spouses. In some cases, their healthcare decisions are made for them by their husbands.

Although the government of Togo provides access to modern birth control methods and contraceptives, contraceptive usage is very low, with statistics indicating that only about 26 percent of all Togolese women in the child-bearing age group use some form of contraceptive.

Interesting Social Customs

In Togo, making shea butter is a way of life for women, and some interesting customs are related to shea butter. According to the *Fulani* custom, a man before marriage has to apply shea butter to his body and ready himself for the ritual whipping. The father of the bride whips him 30 times in the chest to test if he is capable of taking care of his daughter. Before marriage, the bride applies shea butter to her face and arms to beautify her skin.

Women in Business

General View

In Togo, women are primarily responsible for taking care of household tasks and the family. In rural areas, women also take an active part in farming activities, but economic power is concentrated in the hands of the men. A significant number of women in both rural and urban areas are self-employed or work in micro-enterprises.

There is general discrimination against women in all walks of life, but women's contributions to the Togolese economy have mostly been limited by the simple lack of economic opportunities. Only women from famous and financially sound families enjoy the same privileges as men.

The government of Togo has taken a few measures, such as promoting gender equality as a birthright, in a bid to increase the participation of women in the country's public life. However, the Family Code continues to contain discriminatory laws, and there are no provisions against sexual harassment.

Legal Rights

Togo's Constitution provides women with the same legal rights as men. Togolese women have the right to vote, and civil laws allow them to own businesses and to own and inherit land. Under customary laws, however, women are prohibited from owning or inheriting land or property. Laws prohibit women from working in mines and working at night.

Huge pay disparities exist in the salaries paid to men and women in Togo. Statistics indicate that women earn about 47 percent less than men for performing the same job.

Women in Professions

Togolese women do most of the manual labor and account for nearly 60 percent of the total farm labor force in Togo (about 41 percent of all Togolese working women). The number of women working in the formal sector is relatively low, and there are very few female executives and business owners in Togo. One example of a well-known Togolese business executive is Ahoefa Dede Ekoue, who serves as the relationship manager for Women's World Banking in Africa.

The growth outlook for businesswomen in Togo is not very bright, despite the Togolese government's granting of special concessions for women.

Female members of the family, such as grandmothers or sisters, look after the children of working mothers in Togo. Affluent families employ the services of a servant or nurse to take care of the children. The government of Togo does not provide childcare facilities for the children of working mothers.

Women as Business Owners

Women dominate sectors like small market commerce, sewing, hairdressing, pottery, basketry, soap making, and weaving. They control some 40 percent of Togo's industrial agro-food production of items such as palm oil, coconut oil, peanut oil, and alcoholic beverages. Women also run almost 30 percent of phosphate manufacturing businesses. About 29 percent of Togolese women entrepreneurs are engaged in trade, 15 percent in restaurants, bars and hotels, and the rest in banking and services. Women are also involved in the fishing sector as well as in making bakery products.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

In Togo, the local business people treat foreign businesswomen with respect. As most of the Togolese speak French and not English, foreign businesswomen should engage the services of translators from local commercial offices. It is advisable for businesswomen to dress in Western-style business suits for meetings.

The normal custom is to shake hands on meeting. Foreigners are expected to treat older people and village elders with respect. Public displays of affection are considered inappropriate.

Trinidad & Tobago

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The traditional role of a woman in Trinidadian society has always been that of a homemaker, mother, and wife. Women have limited access to economic opportunities, usually in the lower ranks of the service sector, but have made substantial headway in healthcare professions and in owning small businesses.

The society of Trinidad and Tobago has traditionally been a male-dominated, paternal one. Trinidadian women face high levels of domestic violence, abuse, and sexual harassment at work. They face discrimination and greater poverty irrespective of their social and economic class.

The role of women in Trinidadian society has, however, undergone a lot of change. On the positive side, women have begun to assert themselves in various areas and to dominate certain service sector jobs. On the negative end, many women are now the only breadwinners for their families, as working single parents solely responsible for rearing their children.

As of 2005, women occupied 19 percent of the seats in the lower house, 32 percent of the seats in the upper house or Senate, and 20 percent of ministerial positions. In the judiciary, 18 percent or six of the 33 Supreme Court Judges were women.

Women are well represented in the business sector. They own 49 percent of all wholesale and retail trade enterprises, 30 percent of manufacturing enterprises, and 15 percent of service sector businesses. Many micro-enterprises have female owners.

Urban women have higher living standards when compared to their rural counterparts, although social services in almost all parts of Trinidad and Tobago are similar. The role of women within Trinidad and Tobago's various subcultures is quite similar, although Afro-Trinidadian women generally enjoy a greater degree of freedom and power in the household.

There are no dress code restrictions for Trinidadian women, and Western styles are followed throughout the country. It is very rare to find people wearing traditional dress.

Legal Rights

Trinidadian women and men generally enjoy similar legal rights, including in the areas of inheriting property, access to education, and employment opportunities. The country does not have any rules or regulations requiring women to be paid on the same scale as men, so the private sector is notorious for disparities in pay packages for men and women. Government employees, however, are paid equally as a rule.

Trinidadian women were granted the right to vote in 1946. They also have the right to drive and to own as well as inherit property.

Abortion is illegal in Trinidad and Tobago, though exceptions are permitted. An abortion may be performed

in cases where the life or physical or mental health of the mother is at stake.

Trinidadian women can initiate divorces, with the custody of the children usually determined by the courts with the child's best interests in mind.

Education

Trinidadian women are active participants in the educational sector, with most women completing their secondary schooling. Girls are even with boys in primary school enrolment rates and surpass them in secondary school enrollment. Trinidadian women also spend more years in school than men. As of 2004, the literacy rate for Trinidadian women was 98 percent, compared to 99 percent for men.

Men and women in Trinidad and Tobago usually share the same classroom space. There are, however, certain schools run by religious denominations that practice gender segregation.

Although the country's Constitution prohibits gender discrimination in employment, qualified Trinidadian women are routinely denied jobs in favor of less qualified men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

With the huge number of ethnic groups present in Trinidad and Tobago's society, marriage practices vary widely. Hindu and Muslim marriages are almost always arranged by the family or by matchmakers. Most Afro-Trinidadians choose their own spouses and have common-law marriages before getting formally married.

Trinidadian women are allowed to date, with most girls beginning the practice during their early teens. The most common places where women meet men are social and religious events, educational institutions, dating agencies, and dating forums and websites.

Under the Marriage Act, the legal marriageable age for women is 18 years, although different religious denominations have distinct marriage laws. For example, under Muslim marriage laws, the minimum age for females to marry is 12, and under Hindu marriage laws, women are allowed to marry when they turn 16.

Polygamy is prohibited under Trinidad and Tobago's laws and is punishable by imprisonment. Reports, however, suggest that isolated cases still exist.

Trinidadian women have equal property rights and can hold assets separately from their husbands. They usually take their husband's name and retain it until they marry again.

Trinidadian domestic household patterns have changed tremendously, with many households, especially the Afro-Trinidadian ones, having female heads. Female heads of households are extremely rare for Indian families.

Childlessness used to be considered bad and still is, although increasing awareness has reduced the stigma a great deal. Many women these days prefer to postpone giving birth in favor of pursuing their careers.

In the event of a divorce, Trinidadian women are entitled to an equal share of the conjugal property. The final decision on awarding custody of the children is usually made by the court, keeping in mind the best interests of the child. The person denied custody is usually obliged to pay alimony for the child's upkeep.

Health

Trinidadian women have the same access as men to all medical facilities. More than 96 percent of all births are performed in the presence of skilled medical personnel. Trinidad and Tobago's maternal mortality ratio as of 2004 stood at 10 deaths per 100,000 live births. Infant mortality rates were 17 deaths per 1,000 live births as of 2003.

Trinidadian women these days are allowed to make their own healthcare decisions. Women also have easy access to a variety of birth control measures, and awareness regarding modern contraceptive methods is very high. Studies show that more than 83 percent of women in a relationship have used some form of birth control and 44 percent practice modern methods of contraception.

Women in Business

General View

Trinidadian women have made much progress in the professional and business fields over the last thirty years. Today, women work as doctors, lawyers, judges, politicians, journalists, and civil servants. Women in fact dominate certain sectors like services and sales. They have also been successful as business owners, although usually only in small or medium-scale businesses.

However, their earning levels are lower than men's (irrespective of their education and experience), they face limitations in terms of promotions and pay, and they still have a long way to go in terms of leadership positions.

Legal Rights

Women are granted the same legal rights as men. They can pursue education and employment, own and manage businesses, and inherit property. The Counting of Unremunerated Work Act, the Minimum Wage Act, and state programs aim to uplift women's status in the workplace.

Trinidadian women earn far less than men. Their estimated earned income is only 46 percent that of men. To counter the segregation of women in the lower-paid service sector, the government is actively encouraging women to take up technical and vocational training in male-dominated professions like plumbing, masonry, and electrical installation.

Women in Professions

Over 84 percent of employees in the Trinidadian service sector are women. Fifty-four percent of professional and technical workers are women. Women hold 38 percent of the total legislative, senior official, and managerial positions, 25 percent of the seats in Parliament, and 20 percent of ministerial posts. Women's participation in agriculture and industry is very low (3 percent and 13 percent, respectively).

Some prominent Trinidadian women leaders include Senator Joan Yuille Williams, Minister of Community Development, Gender Affairs and Culture; Angela

Cropper, director of The Cropper Foundation and former CARICOM and U.N. advisor; Louris Martin-Lee Sing, actor, director, and producer; and Marjorie Thorpe, a consultant attached to the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago and a former ambassador to the U.N.

Working women take the help of their husbands, older siblings, relatives like mothers or mothers-in-law, or paid maids to help them with childcare. There are also nurseries and pay-schools for children over the age of two.

Women as Business Owners

Trinidadian women are very active in the business sector. Many of them manage their own businesses, although usually on a small or medium scale. Most women entrepreneurs are engaged in wholesale or retail trade (49 percent) and manufacturing (30 percent), followed by general services like catering, food processing, hairdressing, and repairs (15 percent). Women are just entering other areas like information technology services. Most of the informal credit rotating businesses known as *sou-sou* are also run by women.

Women usually start businesses on a small scale, with low investment. Women also have limited sources of credit due to the lack of collateral, experience, and/or credit histories. The added responsibility of taking care of the family also makes it harder for women to expand their businesses. The government has taken steps to encourage female entrepreneurship by providing better access to capital, education, training, technology, resources, and credit.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Doing business in Trinidad and Tobago is not a problem for foreign businesswomen, especially since there are so many local businesswomen. A subdued attitude is expected from women, especially at work and formal functions. It is appropriate to give out business cards to business associates right after the formal greeting.

Tunisia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Tunisian society is dominated by men, who are the breadwinners of the family, while women are expected to handle domestic chores and raise the children. In agricultural families, women perform additional work such as tending livestock and working in the fields. The influence of the younger generation, nearby European countries, and the government have, however, mitigated the traditional discriminatory customs that generally governed the status of women in Tunisia's strongly patriarchal society. More opportunities are now opening up for Tunisian women.

Women make up 29 percent of the Tunisian workforce and many women now occupy professional jobs in the public and private sectors. Incidences of domestic violence are decreasing as more cases are being reported to the police. There are also a number of women's organizations involved in fighting for the rights of Tunisian women.

With the development of a middle class, the lines between various social and economic classes in Tunisia are increasingly being blurred. However, women from the upper social and economic strata of society have greater freedom and lead better lives than their poorer counterparts.

Many Tunisian women hold influential positions in politics, law, medicine and business. Women made up 23 percent of the chamber of deputies, 22 percent of the local councils, and 34 percent of the judiciary. Almost a third of all lawyers are women. In 2004, there were two women ministers, five women Secretaries of State, a woman advisor to the President, and a woman governor in the executive branch of the Tunisian government. Many Tunisian women work in the medical field as nurses and other healthcare personnel. Women in Tunisia are very active in the business sector, with a substantial number of female heads of companies.

The occupation in rural Tunisia is mostly agriculture, and many rural women work as unpaid laborers. Rural women, in comparison to their urban counterparts, have very limited access to education, family planning programs, and other services.

There are few ethnic groups in Tunisia, with almost all Tunisians being Arabic-speaking Muslims. There are small communities of Berbers and Jews concentrated in various pockets. The position of women in each of these ethnic groups differs slightly, depending on their individual customs.

There are no strict dress codes to be followed in Tunisia, but since it is a Muslim country, dress styles lean towards the conservative.

Legal Rights

Women's legal rights are equivalent to those of the men. Tunisian women were granted the right to vote in 1959 and they also have the right to drive. Property inheritance laws, however, are based on the Islamic *Shari'a* code and

discriminate against women by letting a man inherit twice the share of a woman's inheritance.

Tunisian laws permit abortions to be carried out if the mother's life is in danger, if she is mentally unstable, or in cases of fetal impairment.

Tunisian women have the right to file for divorce and the right to claim custody of the children.

Education

Tunisian women and girls have equal access to all levels and forms of education. The literacy rate for women is about 80 percent and that for men is 93 percent.

More than 99 percent of girls enroll in primary schools, and statistics indicate that more than 57 percent of the students enrolled in higher education are women.

Women are given equal opportunities in all public, state-run establishments but not in the private sector.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Tunisian women are generally free to choose their own spouses, although arranged marriages are still the norm among traditional families. Girls who choose their own mates are expected to select boys of equal status.

Dating is practiced in the urban areas, and girls generally start dating in their mid-teens. Common places for meeting men include schools, colleges, and the workplace.

The minimum, legal marriageable age for women is 17. Most urban Tunisian women, however, marry in their early twenties. Polygamy is not legally or socially accepted.

The inheritance law, based on the Islamic *Shari'a* tradition, states that all the property of a woman, including assets solely gained by the woman, belongs to the husband.

According to the Personal Status Code, the husband is the head of the family and should provide for the needs of his wife and children according to his means. This effectively puts the husband in charge of the entire household. Married Tunisian women use their husbands' names for all purposes and continue doing so even after a divorce.

Infertile women face social stigma, and childlessness is one of the major causes of marriage breakups in Tunisia.

A divorced woman is entitled to alimony and maintenance payments. A divorced mother who gets custody of her children is automatically eligible for child support from the father until the children are no longer minors. Girls are entitled to child support until they get married or if they have no income.

Health

Tunisian women have equal access to all medical services provided by the government. Statistics show that 90 percent of the births in Tunisia take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. The maternal mortality rate is

estimated to be 120 deaths per 100,000 live births. The infant mortality rate is 21 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Although Tunisia is a role model for other African countries in terms of women's healthcare, Islamic traditions still prohibit women from making their own healthcare decisions.

Tunisia was named a model country for family planning programs. More than 66 percent of the country's women use some form of contraception.

Interesting Social Customs

As a sign of respect, a Tunisian man will not smoke or carry his own child in front of his father.

Traditional Tunisian marriage customs require the bride to shift from her house to the groom's, while the groom waits outside. This ensures that when he enters the bridal chamber, she is there, waiting for him. The consummation of marriage is followed by a period of seclusion before the couple can normally take part in society.

Women in Business

General View

Male dominance in Tunisia has generally confined women to the role of homemaker, although widespread poverty and unemployment is also a major impediment to women's participation in the country's economic activities. Tunisian women constitute only 25 percent of the workforce, but increased legal protection and better access to education and healthcare services have helped women to overcome some discriminatory attitudes and increased the number of women now working outside their homes.

Legal Rights

Tunisian women enjoy equal legal rights under the Constitution. This includes the right to vote (since 1959) and to own or inherit property and businesses.

Under Tunisian law, women have the right to receive equal pay for performing the same work. In reality, however, on an average, they earn only about 37 percent of the salaries earned by men.

Women in Professions

Tunisian women primarily work in female-dominated sectors like education, health, and textile or clothing manufacturing.

Women rarely hold senior managerial or executive posts in the public or private sectors. However, many Tunisian women have become successful in business. One example is Leyla Khaiat, who runs a textile business and has acted as the leader of various women's associations. Another is Zohra Driss Becheur, an agricultural engineer who functions as the CEO of a group of hotels and agricultural enterprises in Tunisia. Finally, Olfa Majoul, who worked as a consultant and research analyst in France and Canada, ventured into her own business called Yso Consulting.

In the last decade, women have benefited from various policies and schemes that offer women financial aid and training in business ventures. This has resulted in a bright outlook for the growth of Tunisian women in business.

Tunisia's women are not legally prohibited from taking up any profession except jobs that involve night work. There

are no dress code restrictions that prevent Tunisian women from taking up certain jobs, although wearing the *hijab* (traditional Muslim headscarf) to work at government offices is prohibited.

Working mothers normally entrust children to the care of their extended family. There is no state-sponsored childcare available in Tunisia.

Women as Business Owners

Tunisian women now have better business opportunities and currently manage about 5,000 businesses. They are heavily involved in textiles, clothing, leather, and cultural and social services. They also have considerable presence in the commerce sector.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Local businessmen have a positive attitude towards foreign businesswomen. Business meetings usually start with small talk on general topics and often extend beyond schedule due to repeated interruptions. Decisions are made slowly, always by the person sitting highest up the hierarchical ladder. Never criticize a person in public.

Foreign women are advised to be modest in their behavior and their clothes should ideally cover as much of the body as possible. Tunisian men do not shake hands unless a woman extends her hand first. Otherwise they merely bow their heads.

In social gatherings, conservative Tunisians usually congregate in separate groups for men and women, and men and women usually eat separately.

Turkey

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditional Turkish society has always relegated women to the home and restricted them from working in jobs that involved interaction with unrelated men. A woman's status in Turkish society was defined by the number of children she had rather than by her educational or professional accomplishments. These days, however, women play a very active role in society, and Turkish women enjoy greater rights than their counterparts in many other Middle Eastern countries.

Turkey has a typical patriarchal society in which men have full rights over their women and children. Boys are brought up to be aggressive and dominant while girls are taught to be submissive and compliant. This may contribute to the fact that a large number of Turkish women are subject to domestic violence and sexual harassment.

Women's access to important development resources such as education, health, and employment increases with their socio-economic status. The women of upper classes tend to hold professions such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers, while women from the lower echelons of society work as agricultural laborers or domestic servants.

The last couple of decades have seen a change in the status of women in Turkey. An increasing number of Turkish women are voting and participating in public life. Despite the election of Tansu Ciller as Turkey's first woman prime minister, the representation of Turkish women in politics is generally poor. Women constituted only 4 percent of the 550 deputies in Parliament. They have significant representation in the legal profession and dominate medicine, which is considered a "woman's" profession in Turkey. Most businesses are family-owned in Turkey, so women are very well represented in business.

Rural women suffer from greater discriminatory attitudes and prejudices than urban women. Urban women were traditionally confined to their homes, but they have greater freedom these days to take up jobs and participate in society.

There are no dress code restrictions, but Turkish women usually dress conservatively. Wearing veils in public offices and universities has actually been banned by the government.

Legal Rights

The Turkish Constitution grants women the same legal rights as men. Turkey gave women the right to vote in 1934. They also have the right to drive. The Family Law grants women equal rights to property and inheritance. Under the law, a married woman can freely inherit property and need not relinquish her inheritance to her brothers. In reality, however, social structures sometimes prevent women from inheriting property.

The present law permits women to obtain abortions through the first ten weeks of pregnancy on physical or social grounds. After that point, a woman can only

undergo an abortion if her life is in danger or if the fetus has a congenital disease.

Divorce laws are fairly involved. One of the parties to the divorce must give evidence to prove one of the six valid grounds for divorce: adultery, attempted murder, assault or grave insults, criminal activity, desertion, mental instability, and incompatibility. Couples cannot divorce simply by mutual consent. In a divorce, mothers have the right to claim custody of the children.

Education

Educational reforms have assured Turkish women equal rights to education. The government initiated a comprehensive public education system and made primary education mandatory for both sexes. Almost all girls receive primary education, though most of them tend to drop out at the secondary level. Boys and girls attend school together.

Women are behind the men with a literacy rate of 80 percent, compared to a male rate of 94 percent.

Regardless of their educational qualifications, women do not enjoy equal job opportunities: a majority of Turkish women occupy low-paying jobs and earn less than men. Salaried positions, which pay about twice the wages as jobs in the informal economy, are disproportionately in the hands of men. Jobs in the informal sector pay women and men more equally.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditional Turkish marriages were arranged by the parents without the consent of the couples. These days, women have the freedom to choose their own partners, but parents usually have an influence on their decisions.

Although Turkish culture disapproves of dating, it has become the trend among the upper classes. Generally, women and men meet and socialize at functions such as weddings and engagement celebrations.

The legal marriageable age for a Turkish woman is 18 years, and they usually marry in their early twenties. Statistics indicate that women with greater educational levels often marry later in life.

According to law, women take their husband's surname upon marriage and do not retain it after divorce. Though rare, polygamy is still practiced in certain areas.

Labor migration of men to urban areas and foreign countries has bestowed women with decision-making authority in many families. Legally, women have rights to own assets separate from their husbands. In reality, however, the ownership is usually transferred to the men.

Childless women face social stigmatization because Turkish society believes that the birth of a child gives woman an identity, making her a complete woman.

Upon divorce, women have a legal right to an equal share of the family's wealth. A man can divorce his wife for reasons of infertility and remarry, but he is still responsible for the upkeep of his first wife. In most divorce cases, women receive the custody of children. Men tend to

remarry other divorcees and they usually do so fairly quickly after a divorce.

Health

Theoretically, Turkish women have equal rights to the country's healthcare system. Turkey's socialized public health system provides free medical care to all citizens. Urban women have better access to healthcare facilities compared to rural women.

Statistics indicate that 83 percent of all births in Turkey take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. The maternal mortality rate is estimated to be 70 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is 28 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Generally, women require the permission of their husbands to make healthcare decisions. Although most women have access to contraception, many women don't use them due to cultural taboos and the fear of side effects. Contraceptive prevalence in the country is about 71 percent.

Interesting Social Customs

Turkish women can pray only in the area specified for their use in mosques. All movie theaters, restaurants, beaches, and public parks have a "bachelors" section for males and a "family" section for families and single females. In public transportation, a man should not sit next to an unrelated female.

According to a local belief, a woman who can pass a kitten over the saddle of a horse while riding will not become pregnant.

Women in Business

General View

Turkish society is male-centric and women are generally confined to secondary roles. To improve this situation, the Turks are making a concerted effort to increase the female literacy rate by requiring compulsory schooling for eight years instead of five.

despite social and educational disadvantages, many women work in diverse areas including manufacturing, teaching, and the civil service. More women are now entering the service and professional sectors than in the past.

Legal Rights

Turkish women have the same legal rights as men in all respects including the right to vote (since 1926). They also have equal rights in matters relating to inheritance, divorce, and property ownership. Women have the right to initiate and run their own businesses.

Turkish law guarantees equal pay for equal work in professional, business, and government service. Studies indicate that, in general, women receive the same pay as men for performing the same jobs.

Women in Professions

Employment for women in Turkey corresponds with the woman's level of education and, more broadly, her socio-economic class. Well-educated women are employed in medicine, law, engineering, and education. Middle-class women generally work as teachers and bank tellers. Less

educated women generally work as maids, house cleaners, seamstresses, childcare givers, agricultural laborers, nurses, and store clerks. Many women are involved in the home-based manufacture of carpets, rugs, handloom fabric, lace, crochet, souvenirs, and food products.

A number of women head companies in Turkey, with statistics indicating that the present numbers will increase in the future. Successful women entrepreneurs in Turkey include Guler Sabanci, chairman and managing director of Sabanci Holding, Turkey's second-large conglomerate with a portfolio of 70 companies; Imre Barmanbek, deputy chairman of Dogan Holding, a company with 125 subsidiaries ranging from banking and oil to tourism and media (including a joint venture with CNN); and Esra Aksoy, founder of a company that is involved in direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations, and special events management.

Women are barred from undertaking dangerous work or doing heavy manual work during pregnancy.

State-sponsored childcare is not available in Turkey. Working mothers are assisted in childcare by members of the extended family, in particular grandmothers, or by hired nannies. Many institutions run their own childcare centers and social facilities for providing pre-school education.

Women as Business Owners

Women represent 13 percent of the self-employed and a fair share of Turkey's entrepreneurs. Public agencies and non-governmental organizations have sponsored entrepreneurship development programs to increase women's participation in vocational areas and entrepreneurship. Many businesses are still family-owned, creating opportunities for many women through birth or marriage.

Women entrepreneurs are involved in the production and export of readymade clothing, silk and cashmere, embroidery, and traditional handiworks; they also work in software, consulting activities, furniture, marketing research, consulting and organizing activities, direct marketing, pharmaceuticals, and food manufacturing.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign women receive acceptance and a warm welcome in Turkey. Turkish men are very respectful towards visiting foreign businesswomen.

Shake hands with everyone present, both men and women, at a business or social meeting, taking care to begin with the senior-most member. Men and women shake hands or kiss on the cheek when meeting and parting.

Turks typically engage in small talk before they begin business discussions. Decisions are made at the top levels.

The "O.K." sign in Turkey stands for homosexuality.

Turkmenistan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Turkmenistan is a country only a generation or two removed from a totally nomadic lifestyle. While the men took care of the herds and hunted, women were expected to take care of the family, to cook, and to dabble in small, home-based businesses such as textiles. However, with the nomadic lifestyle giving way to a more settled, rooted society, perceptions regarding the role of women have changed as well.

Women began to obtain higher education and work outside the home during the Soviet era, and the practice has not been discontinued. Women still study and work, with many female students even choosing to do so in the West.

Turkmenistan's society is a patriarchal one, though not to the extent usually followed in other Muslim societies. Turkmen women have long enjoyed the status of being equal partners, unlike the typical stereotype of subordinate Muslim women subjugated by the men. Turkmen women were never forced to wear the veil nor were they kept in strict isolation.

Turkmen women play a strong, active role in society. Many of them hold high positions in government, schools, and hospitals. There are 29 women in the current Parliament, making up almost 50 percent of its total strength. This is exceptionally high, even when compared to many countries in the West. The position of women in Turkmenistan's society does not strictly depend on social and economic class, although it is widely accepted that urban, wealthy women and girls stand a better chance at higher education and jobs than their rural counterparts.

Higher education and the pressure of working as well as taking care of the family have led to an increase in divorce rates, something unheard of in Turkmen society a couple of generations back. A rise in unemployment has even led some women to turn to prostitution, with some being forced by their fathers or husbands to sell their bodies for money. Another disturbing trend is the increase in the number of women who act as drug runners, crossing the border into Afghanistan and returning with heroin.

However, despite these negative changes, women continue to be treated favorably when compared to their counterparts in other Muslim societies. Turkmen law guarantees women the right to be represented in all spheres of life, such as politics, law, medicine, and business. Women also hold a lot of influence in trade union organizations, and women head about 45 percent of leading professional organizations. The Deputy Chair of the Parliament, also known as *Majlis*, is a woman, and Turkmenistan's attorney general is also a woman.

According to statistics, 85 percent of women between the ages of 16 and 56 participate in the workforce. The same statistics state that more than 50 percent of all doctors, 62 percent of high school teachers, and more than 50 percent of financial workers are women. Women also represented 47 percent of trade sector workers, 49 percent of communal service workers, 43 percent of

industrial workers, 23 percent of transport sector workers, and 42 percent of government employees. In addition to this, about 10 percent of women ran their own businesses. Businesses owned or operated by women usually focused on the small-scale and retail sectors.

Rural Turkmen women have to work harder to overcome challenges in gender equality. They are often burdened with enormous family responsibilities that include cooking, cleaning, farming, teaching, and taking care of the children. Since young rural girls are often married young, this severely affects their prospects of participating in the formal economy.

Turkmen women normally dress conservatively in long, heavy, ankle-length flowing dresses that are solid-colored in bright tones of maroon and decorated with embroidery around the collar. Although covering the head is not mandatory, many women do so to protect their hair from the sun and sand.

Legal Rights

Turkmenistan's Constitution guarantees women equality to men in all respects and prohibits any form of discrimination against women. Women have the right to vote, drive, and own as well as inherit their own property.

Turkmen women do have the right to an abortion.

Women have the same rights as men with regard to initiating a divorce. The court makes the final decision regarding custody of children, child support, and alimony.

Education

Elementary and high school education is mandatory for all citizens and free of cost in government educational institutions. However, early marriage and limited access to higher education mar the advancement of rural women. In spite of this, many women manage to complete their higher education and take up jobs, with some of the more qualified ones even preferring to move abroad.

Literacy rates for women in Turkmenistan are extremely high, with female adult literacy rates standing at 99 percent and the literacy rate for young women standing at 99.8 percent. Educated women do have the same job opportunities as men, though rampant corruption ensures that obtaining jobs is as much a matter of bribing the right people as of qualifying on merit.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Most Turkmen get married in their twenties, though some may delay marriage in favor of a career. Marriages are often arranged by special matchmakers called *sawcholar*. Most marriages are arranged, but "marriages of love" are gaining popularity. Dating, however, is not allowed according to Turkmen customs. The average age for women marrying for the first time is around 22 years.

Although polygamy is prohibited by Turkmenistan's Constitution, it is still practiced in certain areas, with some Turkmen men maintaining second wives who have no legal status. Most women take their husband's name after marriage, although the name is usually not retained in the event of a divorce.

The migration of men to urban areas has left a lot of women in charge of their households. Women are expected to put their families first and live up to their roles as primary caregivers in a home. When husbands are present, however, they are the ones who take charge of the affairs of the household.

The traditional expectation is to have children within the first year of marriage, with the groom's parents retaining the right to demand divorce if they suspect the bride to be infertile. Women gain status and standing in the household only if they bear a male child.

Under the Constitution, Turkmen women have the right to receive support from their husbands in cases of divorce. The court makes the final decision on various matters such as custody of the children, division of property, and alimony.

Women have the same rights of property ownership as their husbands. This means that they can hold assets separate from their husbands. In practice, though, most families pass on ownership of a property or house to male descendants.

Health

Turkmenistan's women have equal access to healthcare, although rural women have limited access due to the inadequacy of facilities.

Maternal mortality rates actually increased between 1981 and 1996 to 44 deaths per 100,000 live births and then declined to 12.5 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2003. Infant mortality rates stood at about 58 per 1,000 live births in 2000.

A demographic health survey conducted in 2000 found that only about 40 percent of married women made healthcare decisions on their own. The survey also found that among the remaining 60 percent, 41 percent made these decisions jointly with their husbands.

Interesting Social Customs

One of the more unusual of Turkmen customs relates to the celebration of *Nowruz*, a rite of moral self-perfection and self-purification for women. This custom includes a ritual of cooking wheat germ, called *samani*, and placing the dish on the woman's head. Water is then poured into the dish while another woman cuts the stream of water with scissors while reciting auspicious words they believe will make the women fertile. Only women are allowed to watch and participate in this rite.

Women in Business

General View

There is a history of shared labor between Turkmen women and men, owing to their traditional nomadic way of living. Despite a distinct division in labor, women were treated as equals to men, especially in educational areas. As a result, modern Turkmen women work in schools and universities (as teachers, professors and librarians), in medicine (as researchers, doctors, scientists, and paramedical staff), and in business (as executives, managers, and sales people). Social and cultural taboos against working women are almost non-existent.

Turkmenistan's laws provide women with the support they need to establish a presence in the business sector, and today a great number of women fill executive and administrative posts within the country. Special provisions

for working women with physically or mentally challenged children, support packages for pregnant women in the form of bonus wages and paid leave, and attractive schemes on pension benefits have collectively aided women's progress in business.

Legal Rights

Turkmenistan's Constitution grants men and women equal rights in all respects. Women were given the right to vote in 1927. Women also enjoy rights to own and inherit property.

Studies indicate that the average wage of women is about 72 percent of a man's average wage.

Women in Professions

Turkmen women work as teachers, lecturers, professors, writers, doctors, researchers, administrators, and senior executives. Women have a strong presence in the textile and garment industry, including carpet weaving.

Turkmen women comprise 42 percent of all government employees. However, there are not many female heads of companies in the private sector. One prominent Turkmen businesswoman is Bahar Shihkulieva, the director of the Turkmenistan Business Women's Center, which is involved in the education, support, and development of women entrepreneurs.

The outlook for the career growth of women in Turkmenistan is bright. Statistics indicate that 58 percent of the students in vocational training schools are women and about 62 percent of Turkmenistan's entrepreneurs are women (10 percent of all women in the country).

Women are barred from underground jobs or jobs requiring hard, physical labor.

Grandmothers, older siblings, and other female members look after children when mothers are at work. Although the state provides a maintenance allowance in the form of paid leave and extra wages for working women with disabled children or children with chronic ailments, state-sponsored daycare centers for working mothers are not available in Turkmenistan.

Women as Business Owners

The majority of the country's entrepreneurs are women, and they own businesses mainly in small-scale retail, carpet weaving, textiles, and garment manufacturing. Women in the coastal areas own retail and wholesale fishery businesses.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Visiting businesswomen are usually treated on an equal footing by Turkmen businesspeople. Because of the high percentage of women executives and administrators within the country, a visiting woman's authority or expertise is rarely second-guessed.

Most businesspeople, the younger generation in particular, are fluent in English and usually conduct business in English. Recommended business attire for foreign women includes a formal business suit or modest full-length trousers or skirts paired with a loose shirt or blouse.

Visitors should leave their footwear outside before entering a Turkmen home. Do not be surprised to find meals served on sheets spread on the floor. Men sit on the floor cross-legged, but women sit with legs folded to one side.

Uganda

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women's social, economic, and political status is still inferior to that of men in Uganda. Women represent about 47 percent of the labor force (mostly in agriculture, which employs over 80 percent of all Ugandans), but their contribution to the economy is hardly acknowledged by a conspicuously patriarchal society. Illiteracy and poverty, customary laws, patrilinear traditions, and the absence of mechanisms to implement equal-rights laws are some of the reasons for this state of affairs.

Social gender discrimination is rampant in Uganda, where polygamy, female genital mutilation, and adolescent marriages and pregnancies are common. Male family members often violate women's rights relating to property and inheritance, education, employment, business, healthcare, and reproduction.

Ethnic and cultural differences also put some women at a disadvantage. For instance, independent women of the Baganda and Banyankore communities have no right to inherit or own land. Urban women are better off than rural women, as they have higher chances of formal employment. In some communities, girls must forfeit their education in order to reduce the parents' burden or just because of social traditions.

Women have a 24 percent share in the lower house of Parliament and a 20 percent share of ministerial posts. They are poorly represented in professions like law and medicine. There are a few prominent businesswomen and numerous women active in small and medium-scale businesses. Women's representation at decision-making levels in both private and public sectors is very poor.

There is no dress code restriction for Ugandan women. Dresses and long skirts with blouses are common, while pants and trousers are just gaining acceptance.

Legal Rights

Article 33 of the Ugandan Constitution guarantees equal rights and treatment for women in all spheres of life. Women received the right to vote and to run for office in 1962. They have also the right to drive vehicles.

By law, Ugandan women have the right to education, employment, equal wages, inheritance, property, and to choose their own life partner. However, these rights are rarely exercised by women who are dominated by local customary laws. For instance, a widow is liable to receive only 15 percent of the property upon the husband's death while children, official heirs, and other dependents receive the rest.

Abortion is legally allowed only to save the life or physical/mental health of the woman. It can only be performed by a registered healthcare professional with the consent of two other physicians.

Women can initiate divorce, but the grounds must be justified by adultery, cruelty, lack of maintenance by the husband, or other material grounds. Divorced or separated women are forced to part with their property,

home, and even children. Widows have no rights over the property and just act as guardians until a son attains the legal age to inherit.

Education

The Constitution provides equal rights to education for all, but social and economic constraints dictate the level of education among women. In most cases, this means that women complete a lower level of education than men. Girls generally give up secondary and higher education to get married, to work, or to help with household chores.

In 2003, the female literacy rate was 60 percent while the male literacy rate was 80 percent. Women pursuing higher education usually prefer to take courses that are considered more feminine, in the sciences and humanities, rather than technical courses like engineering.

Women are more likely to take up low-paid, unprofessional jobs due to their lower educational status. However, women with higher education have scope to compete on a par with men, provided they can handle male prejudices and social discrimination.

Dating, Marriage and Family

Marriages are still arranged by parents in some communities, especially in rural areas. Young people practice dating these days, especially in urban areas. Boys and girls meet at educational, social, or work settings, and also through online dating sites.

Although the minimum legal marriageable age is 18 years, more than half of women marry before they are 18 years old, including 17 percent who are married by the age of 15. The median marriage age for women is 18 years.

Polygamy is widely practiced in Uganda. As per customary laws and Islamic *Sharia* laws, a man can marry any number of women.

Male family members have absolute authority to make decisions on behalf of everyone in the family. Women are responsible for the household tasks and taking care of the children. Inability to have children, particularly sons, can lead to polygamy or divorce.

Single women and widows without children have no right to property under customary laws. Divorced women lose all rights to property and even custody of the children. Divorced women are sometimes "inherited" by other male members of the family if the woman desires to continue living in the same house.

Health

Healthcare services in Uganda are underdeveloped and beyond reach for many, especially women. Facilities, equipment, and supplies are not sufficient for treating serious ailments. However, reproductive healthcare facilities are generally available, and over 90 percent of women obtain prenatal checkups at least once during their pregnancies. About one-third of births are professionally assisted, and two-thirds of births take place at home through midwives. Maternity and infant mortality

rates are very high at 1,100 per 100,000 live births and 66 per 1,000 live births respectively.

Women cannot make their own healthcare decisions and must get their husbands' permission to access healthcare. The contraceptive prevalence rate is 23 percent. Pregnancy-related health problems arise among women due to poor medical care, but the number of medical professionals is not sufficient to take care of all the cases. Life expectancy in Uganda is around 45 years, in great part due to the prevalence of HIV.

The government has taken various initiatives to promote better healthcare for women. One of them is the Safe Motherhood program, which includes family planning to combat the high fertility rate (over 7 children per woman in 2002). Almost all hospitals and clinics provide family planning services.

Interesting Social Customs

Customary laws recognize dowry from the groom to the bride's family, also known as the *bride price*, and this practice is still prevalent among most families in Uganda despite Article 33b of the Constitution, which prohibits it. Female genital mutilation is still being practiced by people of the Sabinu tribe.

Women in Business

General View

Agriculture employs over 90 percent of rural women and about 72 percent of Ugandan women overall. The poor economy, the insecurity caused by decades of political violence in the 1970s and 80s, and a lack of public sector jobs have pushed other working women into self-employment and entrepreneurial activity to the point where women now run a majority of all micro-, small-, and medium-scale enterprises.

Ugandan women are expanding out of informal economic activities with the help of professional organizations that provide financial and non-financial support for their development, but impediments in education, employment, credit facilities, and healthcare make this a difficult proposition. Women also face discrimination in terms of property ownership, inheritance, marital rights, and wages.

Women's representation at higher levels of both the public and private sectors is negligible. In government, women make up nearly 24 percent of the seats in the lower house of Parliament and 20 percent of ministerial positions.

Legal Rights

Ugandan women have had the right to vote and contest elections since 1962. By law, they have the right to education, employment in any sector or job, and equal wages for equal work. The Village Land Act of 1999 gives women the right to ownership, occupancy, and use of land, irrespective of the provisions of customary law. The Land Act of 1998 gives spouses and children the authority to decide about the sale of family land. Divorced women have equal rights over their property. Widows are allowed to remain in their husband's house by law and inherit 15 percent of his property (in the absence of a will), although this is not applied in practice. The result of these practices is that only seven percent of Ugandan women own land, even though over 80 percent of them work on the land for sustenance.

In 2003, women only earned 67 percent as much as men on average.

Women in Professions

Agriculture remains the primary occupation for the large majority of Ugandan women, as over 80 percent of the population resides in rural areas. Hunting, gathering forest products, pig and poultry rearing, sunflower oil production, and crop processing and storage are popular economic activities undertaken by women.

Other women are employed in low-paying, labor-intensive jobs like cooking, domestic care, and cleaning. Educated women find employment in the formal sector, but not at higher levels. Women prefer employment in the service sectors like education, health, and food processing. They are, however, barred from taking up employment in night shifts in industrial undertakings, except when they are employed in a managerial capacity.

A few businesswomen have become quite well known for their economic independence and contribution to Ugandan society. They include Peace Byanduskya, owner of Blessing Abide Enterprises and Ugandan Business Woman of the Year; Olive Kigongo, businesswoman and President of Uganda National Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and Daisy Roy, co-owner of many enterprises, including Dairo Air Services and the Modern Jet Service Center.

Many governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are striving to improve the lot of women in Uganda. Their main focus is to make women self-reliant and knowledgeable about their rights.

Dress is expected to be modest and decent, especially at the workplace. Otherwise, there are no dress code restrictions for Ugandan women.

Working women leave their young children with either extended family members or older children. There are childcare centers run by NGOs and private parties, but these are very few in number.

Women as Business Owners

Although women own 46 percent of small and medium enterprises in Uganda, over 76 percent of these businesses are insecure, with no permanent structures to house them. These businesses are primarily involved in textiles, food processing, beverages, and services. Better educational opportunities have enabled women to start their own businesses in newer areas like insurance, hotels, social services, manufacturing, and finance.

Many Ugandan women have taken up self-employment due to lack of education and jobs. These one-person businesses are operated with limited marketing and credit and often rely on support from male family members.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Women in Uganda have an inferior status, and this may apply to foreign women as well. Visiting women may be shocked by some traditions like the kneeling greetings women offer to men.

Business meetings may be held in offices, restaurants, or homes. When invited to an associate's house, foreign women may have to wait until the men finish eating or may be offered food along with the men as a mark of respect.

Women should be extremely cautious about traveling to border areas in the north and southwest regions.

Ukraine

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Ukrainian women have always been better off in personal, domestic and community life than women in other Eastern European countries. Ukrainians have always revered women as mothers, wives, or sisters, and women who adhere to these roles are treated well.

Women worked outside the home in a variety of jobs under Communism, but today they have more limited opportunities. Although not a clear-cut patriarchal society, Ukraine is certainly male-oriented, and it has become difficult for women to command respect when they step outside traditional roles. Widespread gender discrimination restricts women's participation in high-paying public and private sector jobs.

Lately, Ukrainian women's activity groups have pressed for greater representation in politics and economics. Women still make up a significant portion of Ukraine's workforce, with an increasing number of them owning their own businesses.

Women are underrepresented in politics. In 2005, the 450-seat parliament had 25 women in it. Yuliya Tymoshenko was Prime Minister until September 2005, and one minister was a woman. The 18-seat Constitutional Court had only one woman at the end of 2005.

Women make up 70 percent of all the seats in the judiciary. A large number of women work in medicine as doctors and nurses. In the business sector, 7 percent of women are engaged in small businesses, as compared to 13 percent of men.

Social standing and economic class affect women's opportunities to only a modest degree in Ukraine. Poor women have guaranteed access to education, healthcare, and other important services. Women in all socio-economic sectors in Ukraine are better off than women in most nearby countries.

Nevertheless, the transition to the market economy has adversely affected the lives of rural Ukrainian women particularly. They are underrepresented in decision-making positions and receive only three-fourths of men's wages. Their access to employment, healthcare, and educational opportunities is limited.

Women in ethnic subgroups, such as the Roma, face additional discrimination and often are less able to access facilities like education and health care.

There are no particular dress code restrictions for women in Ukraine.

Legal Rights

Ukrainian law guarantees equal rights for women and prohibits gender discrimination. Women have the right to vote, drive vehicles, and own as well as inherit property. Abortions are legal and available on demand.

Either spouse can legally initiate divorce proceedings. Ukrainian law grants equal rights and duties to both

parents regarding their children, and custody is normally decided in court.

Education

Ukrainian women have equal access to education, as the state ensures free, accessible, and compulsory education at pre-school, secondary, and higher educational levels for all children. The schools are coeducational.

Almost every Ukrainian girl completes primary school, and Ukrainian women have a literacy rate of 99 percent, compared to 100 percent for men. Many women receive more education than men of the same age and background. Ukrainian women make up 60 percent of all professionals with secondary and higher education.

Though a 2005 law protects women from gender discrimination, both the government and privately owned businesses commonly specify gender in employment advertisements. Educated Ukrainian women do not have the same job opportunities as men, and a majority of unemployed women are highly educated. Employers sometimes collect information on the personal status and appearance of female job applicants and use it to deny them employment.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditionally, marriages in Ukraine required parental approval. These days, the role of parents is limited to organizing and financing the wedding ceremonies, as most young people choose their own spouses.

Dating is widely practiced. Most women start dating in their teens. Young people meet through family or friends, at school, or at work. Couples usually court for about twelve to eighteen months before marriage.

The legal minimum age for marriage is 17 for women. Most Ukrainian women marry in their early to mid-twenties. They may choose to retain their maiden name or take their husband's surname.

The majority of Ukrainian women run their homes as they please, even in cases where men insist on being the titular household head. Women have the right to own, administer and dispose of property. Assets acquired before marriage remain the woman's sole property.

In rural areas where traditions are strong, childlessness carries a social stigma. In urban areas, however, increasing numbers of women are remaining childless voluntarily, and this is considered acceptable.

All property acquired after marriage is considered joint property, and in divorce, a woman can claim her share of the marital property. Child custody is generally granted to the mother, though the court considers the wishes of any children over 10 years old.

Health

Women in Ukraine have equal access to health and maternity care. In some rural areas, facilities are inadequate or unavailable, and women must travel to more developed areas for prenatal and maternity care.

Ninety-nine percent of all births in Ukraine take place in the presence of a skilled medical attendant. Recent estimates of the maternal mortality rate stand at 32 per 100,000 live births. The estimated infant mortality rate for 2006 is fewer than 10 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Legally, women are entitled to make their own healthcare decisions, but most women consult their husbands. Some Ukrainian men insist on making healthcare decisions for the women in their lives.

Eighty-nine percent of married women of childbearing age use contraceptives. However, contraceptives are expensive, and awareness of contraceptives in rural areas remains low.

Interesting Social Customs

According to Ukrainian rural tradition, a young woman who didn't wish to accept a marriage proposal would send her suitor a pumpkin as a sign that she was rejecting his offer of marriage.

Women in Business

General View

The globalization of the market economy, the rise in educational levels, and the growth of overseas businesses have boosted the economic role of women in Ukraine. In turn, Ukrainian women are bringing about positive changes in their lives and fostering the development of a pluralistic and democratic society through their involvement in the country's business sector.

In the rural areas, however, low awareness levels, lack of information, underpaid work, large-scale migration, and the prevalence of organized crime undermine women's development.

Legal Rights

Women in Ukraine have all the legal rights of men. They were granted suffrage in 1919. Ukraine's customary and civil laws of property inheritance are fair, with sons and daughters inheriting parents' property equally in the absence of a will.

Pay disparities exist in Ukraine, with studies showing that the average salary of a woman is 30 percent less than that of a man. The pay differential is particularly significant in the energy and healthcare sectors.

Women in Professions

Teaching and nursing are two of the most common jobs held by women in Ukraine. Sectors such as retail trade, finance, insurance, culture, catering, data and information processing, and social security also have a large female presence in their workforces. Many women are also foraying into traditionally male-dominated sectors such as forestry, construction, the manufacture of machines and materials, logistics, and the processing industry.

Although there are quite a few female heads of companies in Ukraine, women in general are discriminated against and have to struggle harder than the men for promotions and recognition. Prominent businesswomen in Ukraine include Tetyana Kondratyuk, who owns VDone Ltd., a medium-sized enterprise that produces and sells men's clothes; Zhukov Liubov Pavlovna, who runs Perfection, a small-sized enterprise dealing in sporting, IT services, and

Internet-café; Parokonna Valentina Vitalievna, who heads a medium-sized enterprise that handles transport and logistical support for freight; and Pelehova Irina Genadievna, who runs Pelehova, a small-sized enterprise trading in fabrics for sewing.

Women are prohibited from working in hazardous jobs. Pregnant women are not allowed to work night shifts.

Working mothers usually rely on members of the extended family, grandparents in particular, to help with childcare. Urban and rural children under the age of seven attend state-sponsored daycare centers.

Women as Business Owners

Many Ukrainian women contribute to the country's burgeoning market economy through their entrepreneurial activities, but business banking in Ukraine is in its fledgling stage and the lack of credit facilities and capital affects both genders, women in particular. Most women initiate their businesses by self-financing or with financial support from family and friends.

Women entrepreneurs own 10 percent of the large and medium-sized private businesses in Ukraine. Among micro-sized enterprises, women make up 7 percent of owners. A vast majority of female-owned businesses involve the retail and service sectors, although food processing and the manufacture of clothing and textiles are also well represented.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign women do not receive ready acceptance and may need to prove themselves. Prior to your visit, introduce yourself through a common intermediary, by having the intermediary either make a personal visit or make contact by mail.

Permit men to be chivalrous, even if the customs seem antiquated. A businesswoman can invite a male associate to lunch and pay the bill, although this is sometimes interpreted as a flirtatious act.

United Arab Emirates

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

All of the seven states in the United Arab Emirates follow a strict interpretation of Islamic laws, which have traditionally confined women's roles to those of wives and mothers. As the society of the UAE has become affluent and cosmopolitan, however, it has undergone some change in attitude towards women. The government, legal bodies, academic institutions, and businesses are now providing more rights and opportunities for women. Traditionally conservative views about women's second-class place in society are gradually disappearing, as more women venture out of their households to become self-supporting and independent.

That said, being a woman in the UAE still has its challenges. Strict gender segregation is still a way of life, and all public places prevent interaction between the sexes. Sons are still more highly valued than daughters. Domestic violence is a problem, although it is grossly under-reported due to social attitudes and the lack of effective laws. Furthermore, in spite of the country's great wealth, poverty among women is a growing problem.

Women hold some senior positions in the UAE government, and recently a woman was appointed as the Minister of the Economy. In the judiciary, women are prohibited from working as judges or public prosecutors. In the medical field, one out of every three doctors is a woman, and nearly 81 percent of the nursing staff is female. Similarly, the number of businesswomen has increased five-fold over the past couple of decades. In Dubai, businesswomen represent about 41 percent of all business owners, 48 percent of business partners, and 11 percent of managing partners.

Due to massive urbanization, 80 percent of the total population resides in the coastal capital cities of the UAE, and the position of rural women is not very different from that of their urban counterparts. Rural women are typically involved in agriculture, livestock rearing, fishing, and pearling.

The UAE's female citizens are required to dress modestly and to wear the traditional *abaya* (a costume that covers the entire body from the shoulders to the ankles) along with a *sheila-a* (a black scarf for the head).

Legal Rights

The UAE Constitution guarantees legal equality to all its citizens, irrespective of nationality, race, religious belief, and social position. However, gender equality in social, economic, and legal rights is not clearly defined, leaving room for inequity in certain areas. A woman can legally demand a divorce on various grounds, although divorced women are subject to such disrespect that women seldom exercise this right. In a divorce, the mother receives legal custody of children below 13 years of age.

In the UAE, neither men nor women have the right to vote. However, women have the right to drive vehicles and they have the right to inherit property (although few

women do). In UAE, performing an abortion is a criminal offense, however, it is allowed if the life of the mother is at stake, the procedure is performed by trained personnel, and the husband or oldest male relative consents.

Education

The UAE offers free and compulsory education to all girls and boys from the primary to the university level. The enrollment percentage of girls at primary levels is 86 percent, almost equal to the percentage of boys (at 87 percent). The literacy rate for women in UAE is 82 percent, which compares very favorably to the 76 percent rate for men. Women in the UAE achieve considerably higher levels of education than the men and make up 75 percent of National University students.

In the UAE, coeducation is generally prohibited in public educational institutions at all levels, although many private universities follow the coeducational system of schooling. Although the government offers equal opportunity of employment to women and men in all sectors, along with necessary technical training, employment discrimination is in fact widespread, even for educated women.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Although marriages in the UAE are generally arranged by the families of the bride and groom, many individuals these days are allowed to choose their own partners. Dating is not accepted in UAE society. However, many boys and girls in their teens make random phone calls, get to know the other person, and then meet in secret, sometimes at malls, cinemas, or cafes. However, since public displays of affection are discouraged and dating not allowed; contact is limited to talking. Sex outside of marriage is forbidden and engaging in it puts a woman in danger of severe penalties, including jail time.

In the U.A.E., the average age for a girl to marry is between 13 and 15. Upon marriage, women generally retain their maiden names for life. And, as an interesting twist, although dating is not allowed, polygamy is legal. Islamic Sharia does not forbid it, and on a cultural platform, public interest takes precedence over personal interests. As such, women have to accept husbands taking a second wife; in the past this was actually viewed as beneficial for infertile women or widows, who could then enjoy children or company through the clan. However, with media casting it in a negative light, it has become more socially unacceptable, particularly among women.

Men in the UAE are in charge of the households and make all important decisions regarding the welfare of the family. Women take care of the children and perform domestic chores, although they can own property separate from their husbands. Women are expected to bear children, and childless women face social stigma. In a divorce, custody of children up to 13 years of age is typically given to the mother or her nearest female kin. The wife is also entitled to receive alimony.

Health

The UAE offers free public health services and maternal care to women and has some of the best medical facilities in the world. Almost all births in the UAE take place under trained medical supervision. As a result, the infant mortality rate is very low (at 14 deaths per 1,000 live births), as is the maternal mortality rate (at 10 deaths per 100,000 live births).

Women in the UAE are restricted from making independent health care decisions, including those related to family planning and birth control. The use of contraceptives by married couples is allowed, but religious and cultural restrictions have resulted in very low levels of contraceptive use. Surveys indicate that only 28 percent of women use some form of birth control.

Interesting Social Customs

With 80 percent of the U.A.E.'s population foreign born, human trafficking for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and involuntary servitude became a large problem, particularly among girls. The UAE finally enacted a law in 2006 prohibiting such practices. The practice of female genital mutilation (officially termed "female circumcision") is still performed by female doctors on girls between the ages of one and five at hospitals and clinics.

Women in Business

General View

Unlike other Islamic countries, the economic and social status of women in United Arab Emirates is almost equivalent to that of their male counterparts. A growing number of UAE women are becoming career independent and entering the fields of business, the police force, the military, the service sector, and even taxi driving.

despite the region's conservative views and attitudes towards women, UAE has provided its women citizens with equal opportunities to enter male-dominated areas and to hold senior government positions. Women now represent about 20 percent of the total labor force in the UAE and more than 40 percent of all government workers.

Legal Rights

The UAE Constitution guarantees equal legal rights to all its citizens, although gender discrimination does still exist in a few areas. Neither men nor women in the UAE have the right to vote. Women have complete legal rights to independently own a business and to acquire or possess property. The law prohibits gender-based pay discrimination, and statistics indicate that men and women in the same skill categories generally receive equal pay.

Women in Professions

Traditional jobs for women in the UAE are those in teaching and healthcare; however, many women are now working in private businesses and government services.

Although women in the UAE form a large portion of the labor force and the rate of women in business has been progressively growing, they hold only 2 percent of managerial and decision-making positions. Some of the most successful female business owners and executives in

UAE include: Dr. Shaikha Al Maskari, owner of a business empire that is made up of 19 diversified companies; Raja Al Gurg, head of the Easa Al Gurg Group; Farida Kamber, managing director of Cinmar Design; Shaikha Lubna Al Qasimi, CEO of Tejari.com (a Middle Eastern online trading site); Salwa Saleh Saeed Ali Shaibani, president and CEO of Condor Medical Waste Management; and Hoda T Barakat, partner and head of the Intellectual Property Law Department for Dubai's Al Tamimi and Company.

The Federal Judicial Authority law does not permit females to work as judges or public prosecutors.

There are no dress code restrictions for women in the UAE, though they always dress modestly and usually wear well-covered clothing and a *Sheila-a* (traditional black headscarf) in public.

State-sponsored childcare is unavailable in the UAE. Working women typically hire maids to help with child rearing or stop working after childbirth.

Women as Business Owners

Statistics indicate that among the seven emirates of UAE, 55 percent of businesswomen were from Dubai, and Abu Dhabi and Al Ain jointly showed a four-fold increase. About 48 percent of all women-owned businesses operate in the trading sector, 42 percent in vocational activities, 10 percent in professional services, and 0.3 percent in industrial businesses. Other women-run businesses in the UAE focus on financial brokerage, real estate, restaurants, and construction.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Generally, people from the Emirates are conservative in their attitude toward foreign businesswomen. Women with professionalism, self-confidence, intelligence, and patience are highly respected in the UAE.

In business, high priority is given to personal relationships and mutual trust.

During business meetings, women should wait for men to extend a handshake and never be the first to do so. Always use your right hand when presenting a business card. Be patient and prepared for lengthy meetings, project postponements, and extensions before any final business deal.

Foreign women are free to wear typical Western business attire, but it is advisable to wear loose-fitting and modest clothes with a headscarf.

In the UAE, footwear is removed before entering a building or home. Crossing one's legs when sitting and the "thumbs up" gesture may be considered offensive.

United Kingdom

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

The post-World War II period has seen an increase in the participation of women in almost all areas of society in the United Kingdom. Today, women in the U.K. more or less have equality with men. They are active in most areas of society including politics, the economy, education, and social sectors.

The United Kingdom has seen various women's equality movements, beginning in the late 19th century and continuing today. For the most part, women in the United Kingdom are well treated and enjoy a wide range of rights. Some discrimination, both subtle and overt, is still practiced, however, especially at the workplace.

In politics, the 2005 general election saw women take up 126 of the 645 seats in the House of Commons and 134 of the 726 seats in the House of Lords, a representation of 19.5 and 18.4 percent respectively. After the Cabinet reshuffle of May 2006, eight of the 23 Cabinet ministers, or 34.8 percent, were women.

In the judiciary, one of 11 Lords of Appeal, one of three Heads of Division, two of 25 Lord Justices, seven of 100 High Court Judges and 60 of 550 Circuit Judges were women as of 2006. Increasing numbers of British women are taking up law as a profession.

In the medical field, women hold a majority of nursing and clerical jobs in the U.K., and many women are doctors. In the business sector, an ever-growing number of women own and operate their own businesses.

The United Kingdom has a reputation for being a class-conscious society. While this is true, class has little impact on the opportunities available to women or their overall position in society. Women in the rural areas of the United Kingdom often have limited prospects, and the government has programs to increase opportunities for them. Urban women, on the other hand, have plenty of opportunities and access to all areas of society.

The United Kingdom is a melting pot of various ethnicities and sub-cultures, ranging from Asians to Africans and Muslims to Buddhists. The role of women does differ in accordance to the beliefs and customs of each of these ethnic and religious groups.

Women in the United Kingdom have no dress code restrictions of any sort.

Legal Rights

Women in the United Kingdom have the same legal rights as men. They earned full voting rights in 1928, have the right to drive vehicles, and can own and inherit property.

Abortions in England, Wales, and Scotland are legal to save a woman's life, to preserve her physical or mental health, in cases of fetal impairment, or for economic or social reasons. Two physicians must certify that the procedure is necessary. Abortion is not legal in Northern Ireland.

Women in the United Kingdom can initiate divorce and can also claim custody of their children.

Education

British women have equal access to education. Literacy rates for women and men in the United Kingdom are about equal, and both stand at 99 percent. Almost all women in the United Kingdom complete both primary and secondary school. More than half go on to college or university, and women outnumber men in signing up for higher education courses. Boys and girls normally share the same classroom space.

About half of British women work outside the home. Educated women in the United Kingdom have the same access as men to job opportunities, though a modest level of discrimination does persist, especially in sectors commonly dominated by men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Men and women in the United Kingdom choose their own spouses, and dating is widely practiced. Women usually begin dating in their teens, and the most common places for meeting men are educational institutions, social events, parties, and nightclubs.

England, Wales, and Northern Ireland have a minimum marriage age of 18 years, while Scotland's is 16. Most women in the U.K. marry in their mid- to late twenties. Polygamy is neither legally nor socially acceptable in the United Kingdom.

Women in the United Kingdom can keep their own surnames after marriage if they wish to do so. Women who take their husband's names when they marry often revert to their maiden names in the event of a divorce, but this is a matter of choice.

In most marriages in the U.K., husbands and wives make important decisions jointly and share the responsibility for household chores. Women usually have more responsibilities around the home, though, and are free to run their own homes however they choose. Recently, the number of single-parent households in the U.K. has been growing, with nine out of ten led by women.

Many women in the United Kingdom prefer to postpone having a family to concentrate on their careers, or choose to remain childless altogether. The culture does not criticize or stigmatize childless women in any way.

Women can hold assets separately from their husbands. In the event of a divorce, women are entitled to an equal share of the conjugal property, and can retain any property or assets they held before marriage. Custody of the children is usually granted to the mother, though fathers can lay claim to custody. If the parents are not able to reach an agreement regarding custody of the children, the court makes the final ruling.

Health

The government has instituted a Health Inequalities Unit within the Department of Health to ensure that all groups, including women, are provided equal access to healthcare.

The standards of healthcare in the United Kingdom are very high, with maternal mortality rates standing at 7 deaths per 100,000 live births. Infant mortality rates are 7.22 fatalities per 1,000 live births.

British women have full rights to make their own healthcare decisions. Contraceptives are readily available and commonly used, with 84 percent of married women of childbearing age using some form of contraceptive.

Interesting Social Customs

People in the United Kingdom, both male and female, feel strongly about personal space. Standing too close to someone or touching him or her when having a conversation is considered inappropriate.

Women in Business

General View

The past couple of decades have seen a dramatic growth in women's participation in all areas of society in the United Kingdom. Women these days make up about half the workforce, and an ever-increasing number of them are choosing self-employment. This has seen the gender gap in the business sector narrow considerably, leading to a more balanced economic environment. Women, however, do face certain levels of discrimination, including under-representation in elite jobs and over-representation in lower-status work. New laws and government programs have also encouraged women to join the workforce or to start their own businesses, especially in those sectors where women have traditionally been under-represented.

Legal Rights

Women in the United Kingdom have the same legal rights as men, including the right to own a business as well as to own and inherit property. The United Kingdom granted its women full voting rights in 1928. Women in the United Kingdom suffer gender-based pay discrimination, with studies showing that women working full-time are paid 17 to 20 percent less than men performing the same jobs.

Women in Professions

Women in the United Kingdom form a majority of the workforce in the educational, healthcare, and service sectors. These include jobs as receptionists, clerks and assistants at offices, nurses and medical attendants, teachers, financial clerks, customer care representatives, and domestic cleaners. Women are, however, taking up an increasing number of positions at the decision-making level, to the extent that about 33 percent of managers and directors of companies are women.

The United Kingdom has some famous businesswomen, including Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop and Anita Roddick Publications; Penny Newman, the CEO of Café Direct, one of the leading hot drinks companies in the United Kingdom; Aneela Rose, head of a successful fashion business; and Tamara Gillan, the managing director and founder of SPF 15, a brand management company.

The outlook for the continued growth of women in the business sector is very positive, with surveys indicating that an increasing number of young women find entrepreneurial activity an attractive career choice.

The only jobs that women are barred from are certain combat positions in the armed forces. There are no dress code restrictions for women in the United Kingdom that prevent them from taking up certain jobs.

For working mothers, there are many private day-care centers, au pairs, nannies, and babysitters available, although these services can be expensive. Some state-sponsored childcare is also available on the basis of need, and the government is continuing to develop its National Childcare Strategy to ensure that childcare does not become a barrier to women's participation in the country's economic sector.

Women as Business Owners

An increasing number of women in the United Kingdom are launching their own businesses. This proliferation of women-owned businesses has significantly changed the economic landscape of the country, with women being quick to adapt themselves to the changes required in an increasingly technology-driven business environment. Women-owned businesses typically tend to focus on the service, educational, healthcare, public administration, trade, retail, distribution, and hospitality sectors.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreign businesswomen will experience no problems whatsoever in conducting business in the United Kingdom.

Business in the United Kingdom usually takes place in a cool, calm, businesslike atmosphere. Humor and irony is commonplace, although usually only after a certain level of relationship has been established.

United States

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Although American culture is traditionally paternal, women are usually regarded as equal to men in the United States. Women are expected to marry and have children, but there is little surprise or stigma when they choose to assume different roles.

Women and girls are normally treated very well in the United States. The U.S. is not a class-conscious society, and most women have similar opportunities available to them. Lack of education and early pregnancy remain problems for the poorest women in America.

In day-to-day life, women usually receive equal treatment, and this has been the case for some time. Numbers of female graduates in specialized subjects are increasing very slowly but steadily, as are the numbers of women in high-level decision-making positions.

Fourteen percent of senators and just below 16 percent of congressional representatives are female. In 2003, women applying to medical schools outnumbered men, and almost half of new medical students were female. The number of female graduates from medical schools is steadily increasing, and it's estimated that one third of doctors will be female by 2010. Women make up 29 percent of all lawyers in the U.S., but they are concentrated in lower-level jobs. They are about 43 percent of associates in private firms, but only 17 percent are partners. Few women achieve top-level management positions. In 2005, two Fortune 500 companies had female CEOs or presidents. Still, numbers of women in business management do increase each year.

There is a tendency for rural areas to be a little more conservative, but for the most part, women play similar roles in urban and rural areas.

The United States has ethnic groups from all over the world, and expectations about women's roles and behavior do vary from group to group.

There are no dress code restrictions on women in the U.S. Women wear what they choose, from the latest styles to clothes that suit their work to the traditional clothes of their ethnic groups.

Legal Rights

Women have the same legal rights as men in the U.S. They have had the right to vote since 1920 and can own and inherit property.

In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states could not place "undue" restrictions on women seeking abortions. The law does vary from state to state, and some restrictions do exist. More than 20 states require parental consent for underage girls, and one, South Dakota, recently passed a statewide ban on abortion except in cases where the woman's life is in danger. Women who have the resources can travel to states with less restrictive laws if needed.

Women can initiate divorce. Divorce law varies from state to state, but women have the same right to initiate divorce and seek custody of their children as men in the U.S.

Education

Women have the same rights and access to education as men. Most people, both boys and girls, complete elementary school, and the majority go on to complete secondary school; in 2005, 72 percent of female students graduated from high school, compared to 65 percent of boys. Women and men complete higher education at similar rates. The literacy rate for women in the U.S. is 99 percent, the same as for men. The public school system in the U.S. is co-educational.

Women make up about half the workforce in the U.S., and work in most fields, including those traditionally dominated by men. Far fewer women than men achieve high-level, prestigious positions, though percentages are increasing slightly every year.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Women choose their own mates in the United States, except in cases where recent immigrant families may still hold on to traditions from their home countries. Dating is common practice, and most women start dating as teenagers. Women meet men in a wide variety of settings, including school, work, through family and friends, or at social events. On average, women marry in their mid-twenties, though this varies by region. In the northeast, for example, most women marry later. Many women on both coasts don't marry until their 30's. Utah has the youngest marriage age, with the average woman marrying at a little over 21. Polygamy is neither legal nor socially acceptable in the United States.

Most women assume their husbands' names after marriage, though this is not a requirement. On the east and west coasts, it's common for women to retain their maiden names or use a hyphenated name. In divorce, it's up to the woman to decide whether she wants to keep her married name or revert to her maiden name.

Women are in charge of their own households in the U.S. Important decisions are usually made jointly with their husbands, but women have full autonomy.

Generally, childlessness is not an issue in the U.S. Women are free to choose whether or not to have children or when to have them without drawing any stigma. This does not mean that mothers have stopped asking for grandchildren, particularly in the Hispanic tradition.

Women can hold property separately from their husbands, but property and laws vary from state to state, and what may be a woman's personal property in one state may be considered part of community property in another. Law on division of marital property in divorce also varies, but women can normally expect to get about half, depending on her circumstances and state law. Child custody can be decided by mutual agreement or in court. Unless there are unusual circumstances, women stand a good chance of receiving at least partial custody of their children.

Health

Women have equal access to medical care in the U.S. Standards of care are good; maternal mortality is estimated at 17 per 100,000, and infant mortality for 2006 is estimated at six per 1,000. Most births are supervised by a healthcare professional. American women make their own health care decisions. Birth control is available and widely used, and most married women in the United States use some form of contraceptive if they want to avoid getting pregnant. The same applies to unmarried women who are sexually active.

Women in Business

General View

With the right qualifications, women can assume almost any role in business in the United States. Most Americans are prepared to judge women in business on their work history and actions rather than on their sex. The number of women in high-level management positions remains low considering the number of working women, but it does increase slightly every year. Women also work more and more in non-traditional fields such as architecture and construction.

Legal Rights

Women in the U.S. can vote, own businesses, and own and inherit real property on the same basis as men. In 1963, the U.S.'s Fair Labor Standards act was amended with the Equal Pay Act, which specifically prohibits pay discrimination on the basis of sex. In spite of that, discrimination persists. Women in the U.S. earn only 77 percent of what men earn, largely due to lower numbers of women working at high-level jobs. Some pay disparities persist in similar-level jobs, and not all companies are meticulous about reviewing their salary structures for gender equity. Some businesses still run on the platform that men need to receive more pay in order to support families or because the pecking order is established by men.

Women in Professions

Traditional jobs for American women include teaching, nursing, and secretarial work, as well as less skilled jobs like waitressing, hair styling, or selling women's clothes or cosmetics. Some jobs that were nontraditional 25 years ago are now common for women, including chemistry, law, medicine, and photography.

Oprah Winfrey is probably the best-known American businesswoman. In addition to being a recognizable television personality, she is the founder and owner of Harpo Studios, founder and editorial director of "O", the Oprah Magazine, and a co-founder of the cable television network Oxygen Media. Her net worth is more than one billion dollars.

Although the number of high-level female executives is low considering the number of women in the workforce, some do make it to upper management. Margaret Whitman is Chief Executive and President of the Internet auction company eBay and one of the most prosperous people in the world. Patricia Russo, Chief Executive Officer of Alcatel-Lucent, is credited with Lucent's 2004 profit after three years of negative figures. Safra Catz is

President and CFO of Oracle, maker of information management software.

Since women make up about half the labor force, it's unlikely that the number of women in business will increase substantially in the U.S., nor is the number of working women likely to decrease. The percentage of Fortune 500 companies with a minimum of one quarter of their corporate officer positions held by women doubled from 5 percent in 1995 to 10 percent in 2005, and the number of women in executive positions is likely to continue growing at a similar rate.

Most working women send their young children to privately run daycare centers. School-age children are typically enrolled in after-school programs. Some women hire nannies, au pairs, or other babysitters to look after their children. Others women rely on family members such as grandparents to care for their children, at least part-time. Larger companies may offer on-site day care facilities or subsidized childcare for their employees. There is no state-sponsored childcare in the U.S.A. The public schools are free, but those who work full-time use after-school care facilities for their children. Some public schools do have free after-school care, which may be funded by federal or state grants, or by nonprofit organizations.

Women as Business Owners

Women are majority owners of almost 30 percent of all businesses in the U.S. More than two thirds of these businesses are in the service sector. Significant numbers of women-owned businesses are retail stores and real estate companies. The biggest growth areas for women-owned businesses in the last ten years have been wholesale trade, health care, arts and entertainment, professional and technical services, and scientific services. In order to promote more women-owned businesses, the government sponsors special grant and loan programs for businesses started by women.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Women should have no trouble doing business in the U.S. Local business people are generally used to dealing with women, to the extent that it rarely matters if a foreign contact is male or female. This does not mean there won't be the occasional chauvinist or individual who is uncomfortable dealing with a woman or who considers her a lesser entity for negotiations.

Business practices vary from region to region, so women traveling to different parts of the country should be prepared for diverse practices. In the northeast, expect offices to be formal and attitudes to be businesslike. In the south, attire is often formal, but businesspeople may socialize more before talking about business matters, and women may come across as more flirtatious because they are more friendly. Workplaces in the west are often more casual. Americans are still individualistic at times, so prepare to gauge the corporate culture and act accordingly. Business practices that differ substantially from international norms are rare.

Uruguay

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Although Uruguayan women were traditionally homemakers, Uruguay began legally protecting women's rights in the early 1900s, and today most Uruguayan women are productive members of society. Uruguay's culture is primarily patriarchal, and the concept of *machismo* persists there, but Uruguayan girls and women enjoy greater freedom than their counterparts in other Latin American countries. Education levels are high, and many women work outside the home.

Uruguay has a large middle class, and income disparities are less marked than in many other countries. Overall, socioeconomic class has little effect on women's opportunities.

Uruguayan women make up one of the highest percentages of the workforce in Latin America, but women remain underrepresented in positions of power across the board. The number of women in important or influential jobs is increasing, but very slowly.

Although women earned the right to stand for election in 1932, it was not until 1994 that any women were directly elected to the Uruguayan Senate. In the 2004 election, women took only 4 of 30 senatorial seats and 11 of 99 deputy positions. Three of 13 cabinet ministers were also women.

Women compose 70 percent of medical practitioners, but they are less likely than men to pursue prestigious surgical or diagnostic specialties. About half of the judges in Uruguay are women, but there are no women on the Supreme Court. In business, women usually operate in the informal sector, owning micro- and small-sized businesses.

In spite of Uruguay's relatively egalitarian society, urban women sometimes lead better lives than rural women, with easy access to all the facilities the state offers. Economic fluctuations also affect rural women more than urban women. Women in ethnic subgroups, mostly *mestizos* or those of African descent, suffer discrimination, and many work in low-income jobs as a result.

Most Uruguayan women dress conservatively, though they are not subject to any particular dress code restrictions.

Legal Rights

Uruguayan women have the same legal rights as men. Women received the right to vote in 1932. They can legally own and inherit property, though courts sometimes still rule according to tradition rather than the current law, depriving women of property.

Abortions are illegal in Uruguay, except in situations where the life, physical health, or mental health of the mother is in danger or if the pregnancy is the result of a rape or incest.

Women have had the right to initiate divorce since 1912 and need no specific reason to file. Women have equal

rights in seeking custody of their children and most often receive custody.

Education

Uruguay's government has made education compulsory for children of both sexes between the ages of 6 and 15. Primary school enrollment figures are almost even for girls and boys, at just over 90 percent. Children of both sexes sometimes have trouble attending school in remote rural areas, where facilities are limited.

Uruguay has the highest literacy rate of all Latin American countries, with the female literacy rate at 98 percent, compared to 97 percent for men.

The primary school completion rate for Uruguayan girls is 98 percent, slightly higher than the boys' rate of 95 percent. More girls than boys go on to complete secondary school and higher education. About 60 percent of public university students are women. Boys and girls share the same classroom space throughout their education.

Uruguayan women have the highest workforce participation rates in Latin America and are as likely to work as men. Still, women rarely achieve positions of prestige or power in any field. Uruguayan women are also more likely to be underemployed or unemployed than men. Women often earn lower salaries for the same types of jobs, and overall Uruguayan women earn only two-thirds of what men earn, though this figure is slowly rising.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Although many Uruguayans still follow the tradition of seeking a woman's parents' consent before marriage, this is usually a formality. Women have the freedom to choose their own marriage partners.

Dating is allowed, and most girls begin dating in their teens. Women usually meet men through family and friends or at social events, religious functions, or parties.

The age at which women and men can legally marry is 21. About 10 percent of Uruguayan girls marry before they are legally of age, though few men marry before they are 21. The average age for a woman's first marriage is about 23.

Uruguayan women can either retain their surnames or add their husband's names to their names after marriage. They seldom retain the name acquired during marriage after divorce.

Many Uruguayan women are in charge of their own households. In some cases, though, men will insist on at least maintaining the appearance that they are the decision-makers in the home. Women have had the legal right to hold bank accounts separately from their husbands since 1919, and they can hold all types of property of their own while married.

Uruguayan society often looks down upon infertile women, especially in rural areas. In a divorce, custody of the children is commonly awarded to the mother. Men are usually asked to pay child support, though more than half, in fact, do not make payments. Marital property is divided between the couple, and the woman retains any property she held separately.

Health

The Uruguayan healthcare system extended to the country's whole population as early as 1902. Uruguayan women have equal rights to healthcare services. Overall, facilities are good.

Almost all births in Uruguay take place under skilled medical supervision. The maternal mortality rate is 26 deaths per 100,000 live births, and the infant mortality rate is less than 12 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Most women make their own healthcare decisions. They have ready access to contraceptives, which are socially and culturally accepted. The contraceptive prevalence rate in Uruguay is more than 84 percent.

Women in Business

General View

The decline in the economy of Uruguay has led to an increase in female labor force participation. Estimates reveal that women make up 40 percent of the workforce. Women generally find occupations in community, social, and personal services. Only 20 percent of the manufacturing sector is made up of women.

In spite of their contribution to the economic development of the country, Uruguayan women have to contend with the gender-based division of labor according to traditional lines. Uruguayan women have made gradual progress in terms of legal provisions favoring them, and an increasing number of Uruguayan businesswomen have begun operating their own businesses. Their level of participation in the country's economic sector has shown consistent growth, and studies indicate that the trend is set to continue.

Legal Rights

Uruguayan women enjoy the same legal rights as men. Uruguay granted women the right to vote in 1932. Women have equal rights under family and property law, and they have the right to own and operate their own businesses.

The last few years have seen a significant narrowing of the wage gap between men and women. On an average, women now receive 85 percent of a man's pay for doing the same job.

Women in Professions

Uruguayan working women typically have had a large presence in education, domestic services, trade, and cattle raising. Legally, women are permitted to engage in any profession.

Because of gender-based discrimination and a lack of opportunities, very few women run companies or work as top-level executives in Uruguay. One example of a popular Uruguayan businesswoman is Queenie Chaneton de Vivo, the founder and leader of Manos de Uruguay, a cooperative that employs poor women in the manufacture of exported knitwear.

State-sponsored childcare is not available in Uruguay. Working mothers usually depend on a nanny or domestic help to assist in childcare, in spite of the high costs involved. Some women receive help from members of their extended families.

Women as Business Owners

Despite their high educational qualifications, very few women own businesses in Uruguay. Uruguayan women typically own micro-enterprises or small-scale industries that are involved in the buying and selling of agricultural and related products, textile production, and trade.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Uruguayan men like spending time with women and enjoy doing business with them.

Business visitors are generally greeted with a firm handshake. Meetings are extremely formal. Personal relationships play a significant role in business transactions, so substantial time is spent during initial meetings establishing a good rapport.

Uruguayans dress conservatively and foreign women are advised to wear blouses with dark suits, skirts, and dresses for business situations. Uruguayan women do not prefer the bright colors favored by women from other Latin American countries..

Foreigners may need the services of an interpreter, and ideally they should have business cards printed in both English and Spanish. In addition, they may need help from a local contact when dealing with bureaucratic red tape.

One behavior peculiar to Paraguay is the practice of men gazing conspicuously at a woman to let her know she looks attractive. Sometimes, verbal expressions called *piropos*, which can sometimes be abusive, accompany the gaze. Women should ignore such comments.

Uruguayans drink a lot of *mate* (a drink similar to tea). An offer of *mate* is considered to be a very friendly gesture, so one should take care to be very gracious if turning down the offer.

Uzbekistan

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

In Uzbekistan's patriarchal society, Uzbek women are brought up to follow traditional, gender-based roles. This sort of upbringing is aimed at focusing their attention on being good mothers and obedient wives in the future.

The role of Uzbek women is changing, though not necessarily for the better. Under Soviet rule, women had the same rights as men and were allowed access to facilities in every area of society. The post-Soviet era saw the return of traditional attitudes of male dominance and superiority. These attitudes, coupled with increasing religious fervor, led to the deterioration of the social and economic status of Uzbek women.

The position of Uzbek women in society is independent of their social and economic status. Uzbek women from all strata face similar pressures and obstacles to their empowerment. Most rural women work in the agricultural sector, and urban women usually work in "feminized" sectors such as healthcare and education. Women have higher unemployment rates than men.

Domestic abuse is another problem for women in Uzbekistan. It is not specifically legally prohibited, and is considered a personal issue, not a crime.

The government has made recent amendments to laws to ensure women's continued participation in Uzbekistan's public life. As of 2005, Uzbek women made up 17.5 percent of the seats in the lower house and 15 percent of the seats in the upper house. Just 3.6 percent of the ministers in the government were women. Women make up 22.7 percent of Uzbekistan's judiciary.

Many Uzbek women these days study medicine and healthcare at an advanced level. Uzbek women are also involved in business, usually operating small enterprises.

There is a noticeable difference between the role of rural and urban Uzbek women. Rural women often endure physical hardships, and live with traditions that underscore the inferiority of women. Urban women have better access to opportunities and, in general, possess more freedom than their rural counterparts. Uzbek society has a few ethnic minorities, most of whom follow traditional customs that emphasize male dominance.

In keeping with Islamic beliefs and tradition, Uzbek women are expected to dress conservatively, though they usually do not wear veils. Uzbek law actually prohibits people from wearing "cult robes," meaning religious clothing, in public unless they hold a position in a religious organization. Women may wear headscarves if they choose. In the cities, many young Uzbek women wear Western clothes.

Legal Rights

Uzbekistan's Constitution grants women equal legal rights to men in all respects and prohibits discrimination. Still, societal discrimination persists.

Uzbek women were granted the right to vote in 1938. Property is almost always passed on to sons, though

daughters are eligible for half the amount of property the sons receive. Abortion is available on demand.

Legally, Uzbek women can initiate divorces, but they rarely do. The stigma attached to divorce is high, and women are pressured to keep the family intact at all costs. Also, it is more difficult for an Uzbek woman to get a divorce than it is for a man. In cases of serious marital problems like physical abuse, a woman can rarely get a divorce without the approval of her local neighborhood committee, which is hardly ever granted.

Women may seek child custody in cases of divorce, and most often receive custody of their children.

Education

Traditional cultural prejudices once placed severe limitations on Uzbek women's access to education. These days, however, many Uzbek women complete schooling and go on to pursue higher studies. Over 96 percent of both girls and boys complete primary school in Uzbekistan. The schools are coeducational.

The literacy rate for Uzbek women is high at 99.3 percent, compared to 99.6 percent for men. Many Uzbek women complete higher education, usually studying medicine, education, and culture.

A good education does not guarantee a woman a job in Uzbekistan. Discrimination is common, and many educated women are unemployed. Women make up about half the workforce, but are underrepresented in positions of authority.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Urban Uzbek women normally choose their own spouses. The situation is different for rural women, who often have their spouses chosen for them by their families.

Dating is not formally allowed in Uzbek culture, though boys and girls do tend to meet each other at parks and other public places, especially in the urban areas. The legal marriageable age for Uzbek women is 18. Most women marry at around 21 years of age, while men marry at about 23.

Polygamy is illegal under Uzbek law and is quite rare, though it may still exist in remote parts of the country. An Uzbek woman can take her husband's family name after marriage or keep her own family name. Women who keep their own family names are sometimes harassed by having to provide proof of marriage.

Most women are in charge of their households and control the family's expenditures. Uzbek laws provide women with the right to own and inherit property separately from their husbands. In practice, though, families and courts often follow traditional law, and women rarely own or inherit property.

It is considered bad for an Uzbek woman to be childless, and that alone can be grounds for divorce. In a divorce, the courts usually decide custody of the children. Mothers most often receive custody of their children, in which case fathers are required to pay alimony and child support.

Health

Women have equal access to all healthcare facilities, and Uzbekistan has a number of clinics, even in fairly remote rural areas. In spite of that, standards of medical care, especially reproductive healthcare, are still improving. The maternal mortality rate for Uzbekistan in 2005 was 24 deaths per 100,000 live births. Estimated infant mortality rates for 2006 stand at just fewer than 70 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Except for a certain section of the urban elite, Uzbek women are not permitted to make their own healthcare decisions. Cases of forced sterilization have been reported. Uzbek women have access to birth control, and contraceptive use is rising. About 67 percent of married women of childbearing age use some form of contraceptive.

Interesting Social Customs

A newlywed bride is expected to stand at the doorway of her new home and bow down to everyone who enters the house for three days after the wedding. If the bride doesn't bow with a proper show of respect and amiability, her elders may chasten or even insult her.

Women in Business

General View

Women in Uzbekistan are forced to undergo both social as well as economic deprivation as a direct result of lack of employment and money-making business opportunities. Most Uzbek women work in traditionally female-dominated fields such as health care, teaching, and social work.

The lot of Uzbek women has further worsened with Uzbekistan's transition from a command economy to a market economy, which, along with a revival of traditional gender-biased patriarchal attitudes and prejudices, has led to a considerable decrease in women's access to good jobs. The various benefits provided to women also reinforce employers' preference for male workers.

Legal Rights

Uzbek women were granted the right to vote in 1938. Under Uzbekistan's Constitution, women enjoy all the rights and privileges to which men are entitled, including the right to own businesses and the right to own or inherit property. In most areas, however, traditional Islamic principles take precedence over the Constitution and other codes, thus depriving women of the chance to own their own businesses and property.

Uzbek women are paid about 30 percent less than men, on average. This mainly has to do with the fact that men make up a majority of the skilled workforce, while most women take up jobs as unskilled seasonal laborers. Another factor is that employers are reluctant to hire women for "male" jobs, not only because of the risks involved, but also because women's benefits (like maternity leave) make them a more costly proposition.

Women in Professions

More than half of Uzbekistan's female workforce works in the traditionally "feminine" jobs of education, health care, culture, and insurance. Women make up over 75 percent

of the workforce in healthcare, 62 percent in education, 53 percent in culture and arts, and 44 percent in insurance. In spite of this dominance, their chances of rising to decision-making levels in any of these fields are very slim.

Uzbek women are also heavily involved in the informal sector, such as food processing and the sale of agricultural products from family plots. This kind of work is mostly seasonal, so it is often combined with other non-seasonal jobs such as producing dairy food, selling fruits and vegetables, selling poultry and poultry products, and selling handicrafts. All these tasks are undertaken in addition to the traditional work of caring for the family and performing household work.

Uzbek women's chances of rising to the top of the ladder are severely limited by widespread discrimination and practices of gender inequality. Various studies indicate that women occupy less than 18 percent of all managerial and decision-making positions.

There are a few businesswomen who have overcome social and cultural obstacles to start their own businesses or rise to the top of their organizations. One such example is Venera Gubaidullina, who opened the first brokerage office, Badra, in Samarkand and has plans to open a sewing manufacturing plant. Another example is Gulshan Abibullaeva, the manager of Emil, a private firm that combines a private bar and restaurant, a beauty salon, and sewing shop. In addition, Mukhabbat Khudaikulieva is the chairman of the board of Turkiston, a regional commodity and stock exchange.

Under Uzbekistan's Constitution, women are granted equal rights without any discrimination whatsoever and are not barred from any jobs. As a practical matter, however, there are jobs that women are prevented from performing due to prevailing social and cultural attitudes, especially in rural areas.

In the capital of Tashkent, women may wear Western fashions, including short skirts, bared shoulders, and trousers. In the rural areas, however, women dress very conservatively.

State-sponsored childcare is available, although it is mostly limited to the urban areas. Often members of the extended family look after the children of working mothers.

Women as Business Owners

Many Uzbek women have been courageous enough to start and successfully run their own businesses despite male prejudices and hostility. Businesses owned by women typically produce garments and handicrafts or manufacture or sell agricultural food products. Women are also involved in selling dairy products, manufacturing and selling jewelry, dressmaking, and confectionery.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Uzbek men do not have major reservations about doing business with foreign businesswomen. Women are expected to take the lead in greetings and shaking hands. If men are included in the business group, they are bound to receive more attention than the women.

Negotiations commonly begin with business lunches or dinners. When entering someone's house or a public place such as a *chai-khana* (tea house), it is normal to remove one's shoes but not socks.

Venezuela

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Traditional patriarchal attitudes towards women are slowly changing in Venezuela. Since the 1990s, women have become increasingly active in political, economic, and social activities. Venezuelan women are also successfully occupying top leadership positions in businesses and professions alongside their male counterparts.

The Latin American concept of *machismo* is highly prevalent in Venezuela, and generally girls and women face at least some discrimination. It is common for Venezuelan men to stare and make comments about women's appearances in public places. Venezuelan women are taught to ignore this behavior.

More and more Venezuelan women are pursuing higher education and professional careers. The new Constitution acknowledges housework as an economically productive labor and assures pensions to housewives. The Women's Development Bank, *Banmujer*, was established to provide low-interest loans to disadvantaged women. Apart from giving credit and industrial training, the bank also provides free counseling on reproductive rights and political participation, all aimed at improving women's position in society.

Female political participation remains low, with women holding 9.7 percent of the seats in the lower house of Parliament and 10 percent of the government ministerial posts in 2005. There are a significant number of women entrepreneurs, and nearly 61 percent of professional and technical workers are women. Women are also making gradual progress in the fields of medicine and law.

Poor Venezuelan women have few opportunities to improve their lives, while upper-class women often have great freedom and many options. Rural women often have extraordinarily heavy workloads and seldom receive equal wages for their work.

There is no dress code restriction for Venezuelan women. Fashionable clothes, both formal and informal, are common.

Legal Rights

The Venezuelan Constitution ensures women equal rights. Venezuela gave women the right to vote and stand for elections in 1946. Women also have the right to drive cars and can own, buy, and inherit property.

The criminal code prohibits abortion except when the pregnancy endangers the life of the mother, in which case the written approval of the pregnant woman, her husband, or her legal representative is required.

Women have the right to initiate divorce, which they do at a moderately high rate in Venezuela. Women may seek custody of their children, which courts usually grant to the mothers.

Education

Venezuelan women have equal rights and access to education. The State provides free, compulsory coeducational schooling for all boys and girls up to grade 12. 2003 estimates show similar literacy rates for both men and women – 93.8 percent and 93.1 percent respectively.

Nearly 91 percent of women receive compulsory primary education and 64 percent make it to secondary education, although female dropout rates because of poverty or marriage are high.

Although women legally have the same access job opportunities as men, they are often relegated to middle or lower-level jobs. On average, women earn 30 percent less than men.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Venezuelan women can choose their own marriage partners, though they usually marry men of the same social class and race. Venezuelan culture allows dating, and women generally meet men in social gatherings, in churches, in schools, and at work.

The minimum age for marriage is 18, though girls as young as 14 can marry with the consent of their parents or the sanction of a juvenile court. The average age for first marriage is about 22 for women and 25 for men.

Usually Venezuelan women keep their maiden names, which include both their parents' surnames, after marriage. In some cases, women replace their maternal surname with their husbands' surname.

Traditionally, women do domestic work and raise the children, but men control the purse strings. Although women can legally own, buy, or sell property, they rarely hold assets separately from their husbands. Today, more women are heading households, especially in rural areas.

There is substantial social stigma attached to infertility in Venezuela.

Venezuelan women may initiate divorce proceedings, but have to wait for a year after submitting the application. The courts decide the custody of children, and generally women receive the custody. Men are normally asked to pay child support.

Health

Venezuelan women have equal access to the healthcare system. Venezuela has many hospitals, but public facilities often lack of modern equipment and trained staff, while private clinics are expensive. Poor and rural women sometimes don't receive adequate healthcare, which contributes to maternal and infant mortality rates. Recent estimates put the maternal mortality rate at 96 per 100,000 births, while infant mortality for 2006 is estimated to be a little over 21 per 1,000.

Generally, Venezuelan women make their own healthcare decisions. The government has improved the accessibility of contraceptives, and now 77 percent of married women of childbearing age use contraceptives.

Women in Business

General View

The aggressive Bolivarian revolution has brought about changes in traditional patriarchal attitudes towards women in Venezuelan society, bringing women much closer to a position of equality with men. Globalization has also increased female economic participation and improved women's status in business and the professions.

Traditional Venezuelan society relegated a woman's role to domestic chores and child rearing and generally considered their work as unproductive. The initiatives and programs for the empowerment of women launched by the Chavez government have led to better educational and employment status for Venezuelan women. It is also fair to say that women in the lower economic classes have disproportionately benefited from these reforms and that many women in the middle and upper classes feel disadvantaged by the political isolation and cronyism of the Chavez regime.

Legal Rights

Venezuela's Constitution guarantees equal rights to women in social, economic, and political spheres. Venezuelan women have had the right to vote and run for elected office since 1946. Legislation provides women the same rights as men to buy, own, and inherit property.

According to law, employers should not discriminate against women in pay scale or working condition, although female workers receive, on average, 30 percent less than male workers. The new Constitution has recognized housework as a productive labor activity and has sanctioned pensions for housewives.

Women in Professions

Most women in rural areas are engaged in agricultural activities. In urban areas, most women are employed in education, medical services, and banking.

Women constitute 27 percent of legislators, senior officials, and managers in Venezuela, as well as 61 percent of professional and technical workers. Women also occupy a few top leadership positions, including ministers, senators, and members of Parliament.

A few of the well-known women in Venezuela include Reyna McPeck, chairperson and member of the Global Advisory Council for Vital Voices, which organizes training programs for the development of women; Nora Castañeda, President of Banmujer, Women's Development Bank of Venezuela; and Mercedes Briceño and Stefania Vitale, executive director and business manager respectively for Conapri, a consulting firm.

Venezuela has witnessed a significant growth in the number of women actively involved in the workforce, from 46 percent in 1997 to 55 percent in 2002. Women now have more presence in commerce, services, and other micro businesses.

Girls below the age of 14 are legally prohibited from performing any kind of economic work in Venezuela. Otherwise there are no barred professions for Venezuelan women.

Many working mothers take the help of extended family members for childcare. The *Hogares de Cuidado Diario*, a home day-care program that operates across the country,

caters to the care, nutrition, health, education, and developmental needs of children up to six years of age.

Women as Business Owners

A significant number of Venezuelan women are active entrepreneurs. Generally, women run small-scale businesses related to textiles, sewing and knitting, restaurants, childcare, or trading. Women are also engaged in food processing, construction, and agricultural activities.

The Women's Development Bank of Venezuela, Banjumer, founded by President Chavez, helps many women to start enterprises. The bank provides women with credit facilities and industrial training and makes grants and loans to groups of women to create business co-operatives. In the past few years, Banjumer has assisted nearly 90,000 women and has generated over 200,000 jobs.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Generally, Venezuelans are cordial and treat foreign businesswomen with respect. As Venezuelans value hierarchy, foreign visitors should take care to show respect to people in higher ranks. Businesswomen should dress neatly in business suits and dresses.

Vietnam

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

A traditional tenet of Vietnamese society was that public life is reserved for men and the domestic sphere is reserved for women. Although the idea that a woman's father, husband, or son should dominate all stages of her life is no longer prevalent, Vietnamese women are still working towards equal status with men.

Vietnam is one of the fastest developing nations in the world, and its female citizens often play significant roles in the economic, social, and political arenas. The Vietnamese government has made efforts to eliminate gender disparities and safeguard women's interests by increasing their access to productive resources, education, and health care. Still, women often face inequality in education, health care, politics, the labor market, state employment, and access to financial credit.

Vietnamese women are represented in a variety of professions and businesses. In 2005, the 498-seat National Assembly included 136 women, three at the ministerial level, and a few female provincial leaders. Women have also served in influential government posts, including the vice presidency. Almost 20 percent of distinguished doctors are women in Vietnam. Women's participation in Vietnam's justice system is noteworthy: women make up 22 percent of judges in the People's Supreme Court, 27 percent in the provincial courts, and 35 percent in district courts.

Among people who registered their businesses, 27 percent were women. Women run 40 percent of household-based businesses. In 2003, women made up 42 percent of the workforce in state-run enterprises, 39 percent in private enterprises, and 65 percent in foreign-owned enterprises. Women make up 52 percent of the overall Vietnamese labor force, but generally have less prestigious jobs than men and frequently earn less, even for exactly the same work. On average, women were paid 72 percent of what men were paid in 2000.

Around 80 percent of Vietnam's population lives in rural areas, which means that many women work in agriculture and are more likely to fill traditional roles in and out of their homes. In Vietnam, 54 different ethnic groups exist, many of these concentrated in rural areas. Women from minority groups more often suffer from gender- and class-based discrimination, limited decision-making power, limited economic activity, and poor access to health, education, and other services. Rural women also have heavier workloads and are more often victims of domestic violence. They are often confined to household agricultural production and small-scale food processing (noodles, dried fish) handicraft-making, trading, and seasonal labor.

There are no dress codes or restrictions for Vietnamese women, who frequently wear *ao dai*, a traditional long dress over trousers. Many women also wear Western style clothes, especially in cities.

Legal Rights

Vietnamese law treats women and men equally and offers the same rights to both in all walks of economic and social life. Vietnamese women have had the right to vote since 1946, and they can also own and inherit property. Abortion is legal, and birth control is provided free of charge.

Both women and men are legally free to initiate a divorce. Though both parents have equal rights to child custody, women are usually given preference.

Education

Access to education is universal for all Vietnamese citizens, and boys and girls share the same classrooms. The female literacy rate was 86.9 percent in 2002, compared to the male rate of 93.9 percent. Although girls and boys attend primary and secondary schools in equal numbers, fewer women pursue higher education.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

All Vietnamese people are expected to marry, but women are typically free to make their own choices about whom they wed. Arranged marriages are illegal. Vietnamese girls and boys begin dating in their late teens, and they normally socialize in groups in public places. Couples may meet at school, at work, or through family or friends.

The legal age for marriage is 18 for women and 20 for men, but the median age for marriage in 2002 was 22.8 for women and 26 for men. Polygamy is prohibited in Vietnam, but was sometimes practiced until relatively recently because the male population had been depleted by years of war, and many women took husbands who were already married.

Vietnamese women use their own surnames after marriage and do not add their husbands' surnames. Vietnamese women have the legal right to hold, manage and inherit property separate from their husbands. In today's Vietnamese family, husband and wife often share in decision-making and household responsibilities, including childcare.

It is very important for a Vietnamese couple to have children, especially a son, for the lineage to continue. A couple without a male child is regarded as unlucky, and divorcing and replacing a barren wife is not uncommon.

In case of divorce, property is equally divided between both the parties. Women commonly receive custody of children, along with assistance for childcare.

Health

In Vietnam, women's access to health care is equal to men's. However, in rural areas, access is generally poor and women suffer more than men because of reproductive health issues. The Vietnamese Ministry of Health has been gradually improving health care services for women. In 2003, the average number of pregnancy check-ups increased 2.5 times. Most women—91 percent—received tetanus vaccinations, and medical workers attended 95.8 percent of births. In spite of improvements,

poor communities in remote areas sometimes still lack adequate health care facilities.

The maternal mortality rate averaged 95 per 100,000 up until 1999. The infant mortality rate averages 25.14 per 1,000 live births according to the most recent estimates, with 25.54 deaths per 1000 in males and 24.72 deaths per 1000 in females.

The Vietnamese government's family planning policy encourages citizens to have no more than two children. Methods are not coercive, and women generally make their own decisions about when to have a baby and how many children to have. Abortion services and contraceptives are easily available and culturally acceptable. As a result, the total fertility rate fell from 5.9 to 2.6 children per woman between 1970 and 2000.

Interesting Social Customs

In some parts of Vietnam, the bride's parents demand gifts or a dowry from the groom's family. When that is the case, the newly married couple is also responsible for paying the husband's family back for any wedding gifts.

Women in Business

General View

Since the country's move from a centrally planned economy to the socialist-oriented market economy, Vietnamese women are internationally recognized for their significant role in the country's economic boom through their active participation in business, industry, and education. Women's contributions have, however, come at a high cost, with many women now working in more than one job and caring for their families at the same time.

Much of the working class of Vietnam is involved in more than one occupation to maximize job security and income. Almost 90 percent of economically active women are self-employed nationwide, and 23 percent of these women are salaried workers, indicating that 12 to 13 percent are engaged in both formal and informal employment, which is a higher percentage than that of men holding more than one job. The three-fourths of income-earning urban women who are self-employed are typically involved in some type of service business. Self-employed rural Vietnamese women are engaged in small-scale agricultural and non-farm household activities (market trading, garment industry work, and providing other services).

Both rural and urban Vietnamese women are working harder than ever, but the paths to higher paid work are limited and require training and education. Vietnam's younger generation of women living in the major metropolitan areas are better able to take advantage of available opportunities and are creating a widening gap between the quality of life for Vietnam's urban and rural women. Within rural areas, the North has seen more of the benefits of economic liberalization, while conversely, the urban areas of the South have fared better than Northern cities.

Legal Rights

Vietnamese law guarantees women and men equal rights to vote and contest elections, to run one's own business, and to possess and inherit property. In practice, however, women have to contend with traditions and customs of the society that often give preference to men.

Women gained the right to vote during a brief period of Vietnamese independence in 1946, and they now hold 27 percent of the seats in the National Assembly. Although female participation in the nation's labor force is more than men (52 percent), and modernization is at its peak in Vietnam, women are still mostly involved in low status work, and they are paid only 72 percent of what their male co-workers' earn for similar work. In foreign-owned firms the gap is somewhat smaller, with women earning 82 percent of their male co-workers.

Women in Professions

Traditionally, Vietnam's female economic participation has been dominant in the sectors of agriculture, education, health care, sales and services, food processing, and textiles. These days the traditional areas are still large employers, but the garment, footwear, light industry, and service sectors are growing quickly. In education, for instance, nearly two-thirds of teachers are women. The public sector used to have a large number of female employees, but when state-owned enterprises were downsized in 1990, some 63 to 70 percent of female employees, mostly in low-level positions, lost their jobs. Still, about 46 percent of working women, especially those with more education, work for the government in some capacity.

Of the 200,000 enterprises in Vietnam, almost 30 percent are managed by women; and out of over two million private businesses, women run more than half (60 percent). Despite such large percentages of women in businesses, men still dominate top-level managerial and decision-making positions. One of the well-known female business owners or executives of Vietnam is Le Thi Thuy Loan, proprietor of Loan Le Co. Ltd., which provides finance-related consulting, auditing, and training services. Tran Thi Thuy, President of the Vietnam Businesswomen's Council, is another prominent Vietnamese businesswoman.

The overall growth rate for women in business has been quite remarkable during the past few years (15 to 17 percent in 1990-1995, 24.7 percent in 2001, and 20 percent in 2002), and their prospects continue to look bright. Vietnamese women are allowed to enter every profession or business, but they are restricted from working in mines and in water (i.e., diving). There is no specific dress code restriction for professional women, but usually women wear *Ao Dai* (long dress) for both formal and informal occasions. They also wear Western style clothing in urban areas.

In Vietnam, women play the primary role of child rearing, and older relatives or siblings usually take care of younger children while their mothers are at work. Some companies offer daycare and some private childcare services provide services in Vietnam as well.

Women as Business Owners

Out of the total businesses registered in Vietnam, 27 percent are owned by women, and they manage 40 percent of household businesses as well. Vietnamese women have been largely involved in agro-based activities like fruit growing, sericulture, and the production of noodles, dried fruits, and herbal tea. Many women are also engaged in garment and leather industry, trading, tourism, and other service sectors (hairdressing, child care, home teaching). During the last few years, the opportunities for Vietnamese women to open a business have improved, as the enterprise law has simplified the procedure for registering a business.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Foreigners have to go through lengthy and sensitive procedures to obtain the necessary legal permits to start an enterprise in Vietnam. Business relationships with Vietnamese businesses can also take some time to take root since building a personal relationship and trust are essential to business dealings and can be a long process. Women have an even tougher time since Vietnamese men

often are uncomfortable in social meetings and interactions with foreign women.

For initial meetings, dress formally and arrive on time. Shake hands with both men and women, especially with a slight bow of head, and exchange business cards. If a foreign businesswoman hosts a meal for a Vietnamese man, she should choose a public place, and when a Vietnamese man hosts, the Western woman should reciprocate equally.

Western Sahara

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Sahrawi women have always had more autonomy than women in other Muslim countries, even though Western Sahara's traditional society is patriarchal. Years of conflict, with men serving in the military or working far from home, have eroded the traditional system to some degree, and women are active in public life.

Sahrawi women are now some of the most liberated in the Islamic world. They participate in all areas of public life and do not cover their faces in public. The role of women in Western Sahara has changed substantially since the 1970s. With the men away at war, women have become responsible in all areas of society, and their position is stable at the moment. It remains to be seen whether they can retain their standing once peace is fully restored in their country.

Women participate in the Sahrawi parliament-in-exile. The vast majority of local councilors who run Sahrawi refugee camps are women. However, few have ever held any elected office, even in the government in exile. Young Sahrawi women are well educated and work, increasingly, as nurses, doctors, and in other professional fields. Many women also operate small businesses.

The vast majority of Sahrawi live in urban areas. Rural women, particularly those living in the areas controlled by Morocco, face additional discrimination and have limited access to education, healthcare, and other services.

The major ethnic tribes of the Western Sahara are the Berbers, Haratin, and Saharans. The status of women in each of these tribes is materially the same.

Generally, women in the Western Sahara dress conservatively and keep their hair covered. In public, most wear a *melhafa*, a long colored scarf wrapped over the head, shoulders and entire body, over their indoor clothes.

Legal Rights

Western Sahara's Constitution guarantees the protection of the political, economic, and social rights of women. The areas occupied by Morocco are governed by the Moroccan Constitution. As a disputed territory, Western Sahara does not have a formal system of voting. However, a General Popular Congress is held every four years, and every woman has the right to vote and take part in the government-in-exile. Women do vote, but are rarely elected to any office.

Traditional inheritance practices favor men, and women have no legal insurance of inheritance. Women in Moroccan-controlled areas are subject to Moroccan law, under which abortion is legal only when a woman's life is in danger, or when her mental or physical health may be seriously compromised by the pregnancy. Abortion policy in Western Sahara is not restrictive.

In Sahrawi traditional society, women have always had equal rights to initiate divorce, which can be obtained easily and without social stigma. In Moroccan-controlled areas, the 2004 Family Code reform, which brought new rights to Moroccan women, actually made it more difficult for Sahrawi women in Moroccan-controlled areas to get a divorce, since they are now forced to go to court even when child custody and property are not disputed. In divorce, it is usual for women receive the custody of their children.

Education

The traditional Sahrawi lifestyle was nomadic and not conducive to schooling. Until the 1970s, most Sahrawi women were illiterate. Today, girls have equal access to schools, and many older Sahrawi women have learned to read. There are primary schools in each camp and two secondary schools in each region, as well as boarding schools and a few vocational training centers. Gifted girls and boys receive scholarships to go to university outside of Western Sahara on an equal basis.

The literacy rate for women in Western Sahara is now estimated at 90 to 95 percent, the highest on the continent. Almost all girls complete primary and secondary school, and a few continue their tertiary education abroad.

Despite their educational qualifications, women do not hold top decision-making jobs. Women in occupied areas have few job opportunities and usually work in low-paying jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Sahrawi women choose their own marriage partners, and a traditional Sahrawi marriage is based on affection. Usually a committee interviews the couple and families to ensure that the marriage is what both the bride and groom want. Dating is not practiced in the Western sense, but young people can meet through family, friends, and at social events.

The legal minimum marriage age is 18. A married woman has the right to retain her maiden name, use her husband's surname, or combine both their surnames.

Few Sahrawi practice polygamy. Most women in Western Sahara do not tolerate their husbands taking another wife.

The cost of maintaining more than one wife is also prohibitive. In Moroccan-ruled areas, the revised family code places restrictions on polygamy, but it remains legal.

Sahrawi women traditionally play a major role in making decisions that affect the household, and today most are in charge of their own households.

Social stigma attached to female infertility persists in Western Sahara. In divorce, Sahrawi women usually receive custody of their children. Divorce settlements are common. Western Sahara's nomadic traditions made sharing more important than holding personal property, so women do not generally hold property separately from their husbands. Divorced women usually remarry.

Health

Women in Western Sahara have the same access to medical care as men. Facilities include provincial hospitals and clinics run by Sahrawi nurses and physicians, a centrally located National Hospital, and a second large hospital in the most distant province, Dakh. Women have the right to make their own healthcare decisions.

Statistics regarding maternal mortality rates are unavailable, but reproductive care programs are limited, so most women to give birth in their tents or houses. Malnutrition is a problem, especially in refugee camps, and has been the cause of miscarriages in 40 to 50 percent of pregnancies at Sahrawi National Hospital. The infant mortality rate is estimated to be 129 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Interesting Social Customs

While women in many developing countries face social stigma after divorce, Sahrawi women throw a party. The party shows that the woman is free and available, and is an opportunity for new suitors to visit her, bringing gifts like jewelry and camels. Most divorced women find they have no shortage of suitors, as many Sahrawi men prefer marrying divorced women, who are seen as experienced and mature.

Women in Business

General View

Modern Sahrawi women enjoy greater liberty than Muslim women in many other parts of the world. The enduring conflict in that area and the displacement of a large part of the population, however, have opened new avenues as well as obstacles for Sahrawian women.

The National Union of Sahrawi Women (NUSW) has taken plenty of initiatives for the emancipation of women by involving them in political and economic processes and promoting women-run schools, daycare centers, healthcare centers and training centers.

Legal Rights

The Constitution of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic assures women of equal rights in all areas of society. Western Sahara has no formal voting because of the ongoing territorial dispute, but women may vote in an election that is held every three years for the government in exile. Western Sahara has not made any changes in traditional inheritance laws, which discriminate against women.

Since most of the population is located at refugee camps, money has little or no function. Payment is usually in the form of goods and rations. All work is performed on a co-operative basis.

Women in Professions

There are no companies to speak of in Western Sahara. Most of the population lives in refugee camps. Sahrawi women are usually engaged in farming, rearing chickens, tending vegetable gardens, teaching, nursing, sewing and crafts, repairing tents, and commerce.

One famous Sahrawi woman is Moma Sidi Abdehadi, the President of the NUSW and the only female member of Polisario's National Secretariat, the effective government of the budding nation of Western Sahara. The NUSW, with over 10,000 members, has worked hard for the development of Sahrawi women. It is taking vital measures to assuage the misery of women who have been subjected to all forms of violence and discrimination by the Moroccan security forces in the occupied territories of Morocco.

Sahrawian women usually wear a *melhafa* (a colorful scarf draped over the head, shoulders and whole body) with Western clothes beneath it. They are not required to veil their faces. There are no restrictions on women taking up any particular job, although laws prohibit women from working under hazardous situations.

Women have set up daycare centers in the refugee camps to lessen the burden of working women. State-sponsored childcare is not available in Western Sahara.

Women as Business Owners

Living in refugee camps, Sahrawi women have extremely limited opportunities to set up businesses on a commercial scale. The only businesses owned by Sahrawi women are micro-sized ones involved in growing crops, selling chickens, sewing, and manufacturing handicrafts, including carpets and sandals.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Sahrawis tend to treat foreigners with respect. A handshake is the norm of greeting. Men wait for the woman to extend her hand first. People who know each other well will usually kiss each other on the cheeks while shaking hands. When invited to a social function, start shaking hands with the person on the right and then work one's way across the room, going from the right to left.

The unexploded landmines of the Western Sahara pose a threat to travelers. Visiting foreigners should also take precautionary safety measures, as theft is common.

Travelers planning to enter Western Sahara through Morocco must obtain clearance from the Moroccan Embassy. Travel insurance is critical.

Yemen

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Yemeni society has always cast women as mothers, wives, or sisters, subordinate to men and associated primarily with homemaking and child rearing. Yemen's society is strongly patriarchal. Men are the ones who participate in public life and protect their families' image.

Women in Yemen often lead circumscribed lives. Most do not attend school or work outside the home. Although there are no legal restrictions on women's travel, it's common for women to have to prove that they have the permission of a male relative to travel before they can apply for a passport or travel outside the country. For the few women who do work outside the home, sexual harassment is a persistent problem, and there are no laws prohibiting this behavior. Upper class women have more opportunities and privileges, though not always more freedom, than poor women.

The female role in society, however, may be undergoing some change. The government actively encourages women to vote, and efforts to get girls to attend school are having some effect. But Yemeni women still only occupy one of the 301 seats in parliament. There is also a female minister in the cabinet. Women have some representation in the judiciary, but female judges and lawyers are sometimes prevented from entering courtrooms. Women seldom hold key positions in government or the private sector. A few women work as teachers or in the textile industry. Traditional attitudes often prevent women from holding jobs in the public sector. Rural women have heavier workloads than their urban counterparts, and limited access to education and health services.

Yemeni women are not legally required to wear veils, though many of them wear a black abaya or sharshaf. In traditional areas, a colored outer garment is sometimes used. Younger women tend to cover their hair, but not their faces.

Legal Rights

The 1994 constitution of Yemen proclaims that women are men's sisters and have equal rights in all spheres of life – social, economic, and political. In spite of that, traditional attitudes continue to limit women's rights. Yemeni women won the right to vote and contest in elections in 1970, and women also have the right to drive cars. But property is normally bequeathed to the oldest son. Under *Sharia* law, the mother of the deceased receives one-sixth of his estate, a widow one-eighth, and a daughter can inherit half of her brother's share. Although women have access to land, they generally turn over administrative power to male relatives.

Yemeni law prohibits abortion except when it's necessary to save a woman's life. A woman can initiate divorce only if she can prove that she has a good reason to ask for the divorce, while men can get a divorce without having to give a reason in court. A woman who files for divorce also has to return the bride price her husband paid. If a man initiates the divorce, however, his wife can keep the bride

price. In divorce, children may stay with their mothers only until they are seven years old, and then only if she does not remarry. After that, they must go to their fathers.

Education

In theory, women have the same access and rights to education as men. In fact, though, very few Yemeni girls go to school. By 2003 estimates, less than one third of Yemeni women over 15 can read and write, while 70 percent of men are literate.

Twice as many boys as girls are enrolled at primary and secondary schools. Most girls drop out by the time they reach secondary school. Reasons are many; parents prefer that their daughters attend all-girl schools and have female teachers, but most schools are co-educational and there are only a few trained female teachers. Even the walk to school can be an issue, because many parents fear for their daughters' safety in public places as the girls get older. Some girls leave school early to get married. Cost is also an issue. Uniforms, school fees, and travel expenses are often a burden on poorer families, and they usually prefer to send the boys to school if they can afford it at all. Very few girls go on to higher education, even amongst those who complete their secondary education. Nearly 85 percent of schools in rural areas and 60 percent of schools in urban regions are co-educational.

Legally, Yemeni women have equal job opportunities, but discrimination persists and legal protections against discrimination are ineffective. Women are only 23 percent of the labor force and mostly work in low-paying private sector jobs, if they work at all.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Yemeni parents arrange marriages for their children, but forced marriages are not encouraged. A Yemeni wedding is a union of two families and the groom's father has to pay a bride price on marriage, while a girl's parents have obligations to help her in hard times.

Dating is not accepted in Yemeni society. Perhaps as such, the legal marriageable age for girls is 15. However, they often get married earlier, sometimes as young as 12. The average marriage age is about 20. Yemeni law allows polygamy, and a man can take up to four wives if he can provide equally for all of them. It is culturally acceptable and viewed as a safety network since individuals are cared for in a clan. A woman legally retains her family name when she marries, even though she may be called by her husband's name in some situations.

Yemeni women take responsibility of all household chores and usually leave the decision-making and household budget to men. In 2004, the law that women must obey their husbands was rescinded, paving the way for more women to control their own households.

Since the culture gives significant importance to the reproductive roles of women, childless women are often socially stigmatized. Childless women also risk being divorced by their husbands. When a husband initiates a divorce, the wife can keep her bride price. She can remarry after four months and ten days, and the husband

has to maintain her during this time. Generally upon divorce, women receive the custody of children under seven years of age as long as they don't remarry, and women have full rights over their personal possessions and all property acquired during marriage.

Health

Yemeni women have equal access to healthcare facilities. Unfortunately, these are not adequate, and most women do not receive basic health care. Both maternal and infant mortality rates are high. Recent estimates put maternal deaths at 350 per 100,000, while infant mortality is estimated at just below 60 per 1000 for 2006.

Generally, Yemeni women do not make healthcare decisions without their husbands' consent. Access to birth control is limited, and many Yemeni women are unaware of modern family planning methods. The contraceptive prevalence rate is only about 23 percent. Low birth control use is attributed to poor education and lack of availability of modern contraceptive methods. An average woman gives birth to almost seven children in her lifetime.

Female genital mutilation is still widespread, particularly in certain areas like Hodeida, Hudhramout, and Al Mahra, where over 96 percent of women are subject to the practice. Major cities like Aden had a reported 82.2 percent of women subjected to the practice, while 45.5 percent of the women of the capital city, Sana'a, have to endure it. A 2006 World Health Organization study confirmed that females who gave birth after having undergone the mutilation were more likely to need caesarean sections and were at risk of excessive bleeding, extended labor, or death. Unicef conducted a workshop in Yemen to formulate a national action plan to fight the practice in 2008. Various U.N. agencies, non-governmental agencies, governmental ministries, academic institutions, donors, and development partners took part in the drafting of the national action plan.

Interesting Social Customs

Traditional Yemeni homes are divided into men's and women's areas. Some even have separate staircases, and room entrances are often concealed with screens or partitions.

Women in Business

General View

Most of the Yemeni women who work outside the home have occupations in agriculture or the service sector. The *Sharia* law (Islamic legal code) bestows women equal rights with men and gives them full liberty to engage in socio-economic activities. The de facto gender division of labor, however, restricts women to traditional activities. Many women work as teachers, nurses, and doctors. Recently, Yemen has witnessed a gradual increase of women in the labor force. This may be attributed to male labor migration in Yemen, which has compelled many women to take up jobs once dominated by men.

Legal Rights

The legal system of Yemen, based on Islamic laws, provides equal rights to women in most spheres. However, in practice, religious authorities advocate gender segregation and limit women's access to equal

rights. All Yemeni women obtained the right to vote and to run for elected office in 1970.

The constitution guarantees women equal rights with men in property and inheritance. Daughters can inherit their parents' property, and widows are entitled to the major share of the property. When a person dies without a written will, the property is equally divided among all heirs and close relatives without gender discrimination.

Although women have legal safeguards and educational qualifications, they generally receive lower salaries than men. Women farmhands, for instance, earn 300-350 rials compared to men's wages of 900 rials.

Women in Professions

Prevalent gender discrimination in Yemen restricts women to jobs in agriculture and the service sector, particularly education and health care. Traditional prejudices prevent women from obtaining public sector jobs.

The patriarchal society considers women inferior to men and excludes them from key positions in economic, social, and political spheres. However, Yemeni women have made gradual inroads into male-dominated fields, and a few women have succeeded in business and professions. Amat al-Aleem Alsoswa, for instance, started her career as a journalist and later became a TV announcer, an activist, a politician, a permanent undersecretary, an ambassador, and the first female Yemeni Human Rights Minister. Amina Al-Amrani runs a successful chain of shops selling fruits and vegetables across Sana'a, employing 25 workers. Rosa Mustafa Abdulkhaleq is the first female pilot in Yemen.

Although laws do not prohibit women from any occupations, social attitudes forbid women from working in mines, carpentry, metal working, and stonemasonry. The labor code also bans women from working at night and under hazardous conditions. Generally, Yemeni women dress conservatively in dresses that cover most of their body, and many also wear veils.

Working mothers can send their children to publicly funded daycare centers, and may also choose from a large number of private childcare centers.

Women as Business Owners

Yemeni women own only 3 percent of the micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises in the country. Most women own businesses in the service sector: beauty care, education, garments, and health services. A few are also involved in trading and manufacturing. Social norms inhibit any larger involvement in business.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Despite the conservatism in Yemen, people receive foreign businesswomen with respect and cordiality. However, foreign women should behave discreetly and take care to show consideration for local customs. Senior government officials or wealthy individuals may expect businesspeople to address them with titles, like Excellency or Sheikh.

Foreign businesswomen should dress modestly in long skirts and loose blouses or jackets, taking care not to reveal the body. Women should always sit in the back seat when traveling in a local taxi.

Zambia

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Women have always played a subsidiary role to men in Zambia and are generally confined to domestic responsibilities. Even though more Zambian women have entered the workforce, they still have to contend with the inherent gender discrimination of the patriarchal culture.

Government policies and non-governmental organizations have encouraged women to continue their education after marriage and/or childbirth and have trained and supplied women who want to start cooperatives or run their own businesses.

Women hold 11 percent of the seats in the Parliament and 2 percent of local justice positions in the judiciary. They have a far more substantial presence in the private sector as the proprietors of small-scale businesses.

Women belonging to the upper class or living in urban areas have better opportunities than their poorer rural sisters.

Northern Zambians have a closely knit family circle, where a man has shared responsibility for his brother's children and a woman's sisters are considered mothers to her children. In matrilineal families in South Zambia, a mother's brother has the ultimate authority within the family.

Traditional Zambian women dress conservatively in knee-length skirt or culottes.

Legal Rights

The Zambian Constitution grants equal rights to women in everything but family and inheritance laws. Women obtained the right to vote and to run for office in 1962. Under statutory law, the children of a deceased man receive 50 percent of his property, his widow 20 percent, his parents 20 percent, and other relatives 10 percent. In reality, the man's family and relatives usually acquire most of the property and leave the widow with little or no property.

The abortion law allows women to obtain abortions only if three medical practitioners confirm that the pregnancy can endanger the mother's life or if there is early detection of a fetus with congenital disorders.

Women can initiate divorce. They can appeal in the local courts or the High Court of Zambia, depending on the type of marriage.

Education

Zambian women have a low literacy rate of 60 percent, compared to the men's rate of 76 percent. Most girls obtain a primary education, but their enrollment in secondary school or university is much lower.

Although educational facilities and opportunities for women have improved, women still face employment discrimination that tends to relegate them to low-paid and low-status jobs.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Traditional Zambians married within their tribes with the help of a mediator. These days, Zambian culture approves of dating and allows women to choose their own partners. Women usually meet men in social gatherings or through the Internet.

The legal minimum age for marriage is 18, but many Zambian women marry at an earlier age. Although polygamy is legally prohibited, the traditional culture approves if the first wife sanctions it at the time of her marriage.

Zambians consider childlessness as a curse, and most childless couples apply for a divorce or approve a second marriage. Some couples take the advice of witch doctors to alleviate the problem.

Upon divorce, women usually get back their payment of *malobolo* or *lobola* (bride wealth). If the husband's family has paid the dowry, then the custody of children vests with the father or his family.

Women seldom own property separate from their husbands in this traditional society.

Health

Women have equal access to health care in Zambia, but the high cost of clinics and hospitals restricts poor women's access to health care facilities. Zambia has a high maternal mortality rate (650 per 100,000 live births) and infant mortality rate (112 per 1,000 live births). Traditional culture also has an impact on the health of women. For instance, in some areas women are restricted from eating eggs, milk, or beef.

Zambian women need the consent of their husbands in all decisions regarding their health. Awareness and availability of contraceptive methods in Zambia has increased women's usage of modern birth control techniques.

Interesting Social Customs

In some parts of Zambia, people still observe the traditional practice of "sexual cleansing," under which a widow has sex with her late husband's relatives as part of a purification ritual.

Women in Business

General View

Women make up 60 percent of the rural population of Zambia and, in addition to their work in the household and as midwives, they are very active in the agriculture, trade, and service sectors of the economy. A small segment of Zambian women enjoy formal employment in education, other professions, government, and business.

Access to formal employment, education, and credit is difficult for Zambian women due to a tradition of male-dominance, which has hampered their development. NGOs, development agencies, and the Zambian government have undertaken initiatives to improve this situation.

Legal Rights

Zambian Women only began to enjoy equal legal status with men relatively recently. They obtained the right to vote and run for election in 1962, and it was 30 years later before a woman was appointed as a minister in the government. Recognition of land rights, in both rural and urban Zambia, is hampered by a patriarchal structure and mechanisms that keep land out of women's hands. The housing empowerment schemes recently implemented by the Zambian government to address this problem have only been partially successful.

In marriages where the bride moves to the bridegroom's area of the country, the wife does not have the right to inherit her husband's property in the event of her husband's death. In general, customary law and practice only allows a woman access to 20 percent of her husband's property after his death.

Women are employed at lower wages than their male counterparts. Those with no education earn 65 percent as much as men with no education; while those with low education earn 59 percent as much as men with little education; and women with a medium or high amount of education earn 95 percent as much as their male peers.

Women in Professions

The traditional work of Zambian women involves agriculture, craftwork, and the provision of various services through their many businesses in the informal sector. Women's participation in decision-making roles in the formal business sector and government is limited. They still only represent 12 percent of the seats in Zambia's lower house of Parliament, and they hold approximately 30 percent of administrative positions in the government.

Princess Nakatindi Wina, Marsha Moyo, and Alice Mulenga Lenshina are well-known Zambian leaders. Nakatindi is a former minister (for tourism, community development, and social welfare) and former member of Parliament, who is a very vocal advocate of democracy in Zambia (a stance for which she served in jail for treason). Moyo started a ten-person media monitoring business in 1996, took a position as the marketing services manager for Zambia Sugar, and then embarked on a successful international career as a singer. Alice Mulenga Lenshina is the founder of Lumpur church and an important political figure.

Night-shift work and underground work are the areas restricted for Zambian women. As for attire, women follow a conservative dress code with knee-length skirts or culottes. A woman wearing revealing clothing in town implies that she is a woman of ill repute, and untidy clothing suggests a person of low social standing.

The female workforce, both in urban and rural areas, typically entrusts the care of their younger children to their older children or relatives while they go to work. Various childcare centers are also available for working mothers.

Women as Business Owners

Zambia's women entrepreneurs run many micro and small-scale enterprises, representing up 46 percent of the business owned and employing 47 percent of total workforce. Enterprises owned by women are typically involved in trading (33%), services (31%), and manufacturing (25.4%). Typical trading businesses

include groceries, pharmacies, and butcher shops, and popular service businesses include tailoring, hair salons, restaurants, nurseries, and medical clinics.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Zambia is a male-dominated society, but foreign businesswomen are treated with respect. An interest in one's business partners (their clan, their family, their culture) and ties with local community leaders can help to forge relationships. Eye contact with men and elders for an extended period of time is considered rude. Emotional displays should also be avoided. As a sign of respect, one's tone of voice should be kept low. Avoid being confrontational, and speak through a third party if concerning any delicate matters you need to address. Avoid certain gestures and behavior during conversation: i.e., using the index finger in any gesture; shaking hands with left hand; touching someone on the head; or whistling. Zambians tend to be close with people of same sex. Shake hands each time you meet a Zambian, but be aware that men and women will greet and shake hands from a distance.

Zimbabwe

Women in Culture

General View and Position in Society

Zimbabwean women have a slightly better position in society compared to their counterparts in nearby African nations. Zimbabwe's Constitution guarantees women equal rights, but customary law does not and is often given precedence. Zimbabwe is predominantly a paternal society. Poverty and violence remain persistent problems for Zimbabwean women.

The position of Zimbabwean women is dependent on their social and economic class. Upper-class women not only have access to more resources when it comes to education and health care, they also occupy a privileged place in society. Class consciousness can make it difficult for a woman born into poverty to improve her situation.

The role of Zimbabwean women is slowly changing. More women are becoming more educated and working in professional jobs. Zimbabwean women are relatively well represented in politics. Out of the 150 seats in parliament, women occupy 22, or about 15 percent. The Senate has 20 women members, including the president of the Senate. A vice president, three ministers, a deputy minister, and two governors are also female.

Women are the majority of Zimbabwe's nurses, and the number of female doctors is expected to increase with changes in rules at the country's medical schools. Women are represented in law as well. Of five Supreme Court judges, two are women. Twenty-five High Court judges are women, and so are 300 magistrates in the Public Service. Women run about 67 percent of small and medium-sized businesses in Zimbabwe.

While rural women in Zimbabwe are mostly involved in taking care of the family and working in the fields, urban women play an active role in society, involved in government, politics, economy, and business. The roles of women also differ from tribe to tribe. For example, women from patriarchal tribes such as Shona, Ndebele, Shangaan, and Venda move into their husband's homes after marriage while men belonging to the matrilineal Tonga tribe move into their wife's house after marriage.

There are no dress code restrictions for Zimbabwean women, though most dress conservatively. Dresses and skirts are common, though pantsuits are becoming more popular in urban areas.

Legal Rights

Zimbabwe's Constitution explicitly provides women all the same legal rights as men, and gender discrimination is prohibited. Zimbabwean women can drive cars and earned the right to vote in 1957.

According to Zimbabwe's Constitution, women can own and inherit property independently of their husbands or fathers. Under African customary law, however, married women are not allowed to own property either separately from or jointly with their husbands. In 1997, just before the law protecting women's rights to property was passed, the Supreme Court ruled that a man's claim to family property

took precedence over a woman's under African customary law. As a result, many Zimbabweans still do not understand the law, and most follow customary inheritance laws. Although women can legally inherit property, it is unusual for them to do so.

Abortion is legal when the woman's life or health is in danger, and in cases of rape, incest, or fetal impairment. Zimbabwean women have the right to initiate divorce. In customary marriages, divorce carries a heavy stigma and is very rare. In civil marriages, which are less common, divorce is the usual way of dissolving a marriage. In either kind of marriage, women are normally awarded custody of children after a divorce.

Education

Female attendance at Zimbabwe's schools and universities is increasing. Primary school enrollment and completion rates are comparable for boys and girls. The literacy rate for women is about 85 percent, compared to 90 percent for men.

Many Zimbabwean women manage to complete high school, though statistics indicate that most rural girls only last through primary school. About 18 percent of girls drop out in grades one to four, and another 33 percent drop out between primary and secondary school. Girls who leave secondary school usually do so because of unexpected pregnancy and early marriage. To reduce the gender disparity in higher education, the University of Zimbabwe sets aside 30 percent of first year admission places for women.

Educated women are discriminated against in the job market, but Zimbabwean women still have better chances of getting a job than their counterparts elsewhere in Africa.

Dating, Marriage, and Family

Arranged marriages are rare, and most women choose their own mates. Families on both sides are usually actively involved in the marriage negotiations. Zimbabwean culture permits dating, and girls sometimes begin dating when in school. Zimbabwean women meet men at school, in the workplace, and through family and friends. The minimum legal age for marriage is 18, and the average age for women getting married for the first time is about 21.

Polygamy is recognized under the African customary laws of marriage and is socially accepted, especially in rural areas. Polygamy used to be quite common but is fast declining due to the enormous expenses involved in maintaining multiple wives. Church groups and tribal leaders have recently spoken out against polygamy in the hopes of reducing the spread of AIDS.

A Zimbabwean woman may keep her maiden name or use it in combination with her husband's name. Many Zimbabwean women head their own households. Even when men control the household, women exert a considerable influence on important domestic decisions.

Zimbabweans typically look down on childless women, who may be considered to bring bad luck. In the event of a divorce involving children, custody is usually awarded to

the mother, though the father remains the natural guardian of children he has legitimately fathered.

Zimbabwean laws allow women to own property independently of her husband or father, though African customary law prohibits women from owning land. A woman who is dissolving a civil marriage can expect to keep any property she has held separately from her husband. In the rare cases where a customary marriage is dissolved, the woman is commonly left destitute.

Health

The Zimbabwean government estimates that about 80 percent of the rural and 90 percent of the urban population have access to health care; in reality, the figures may be a lot lower. Many healthcare centers lack supplies and qualified staff. On the national level, the nurse to patient ratio is 1:1,000 and the doctor to patient ratio is 1:10,000. Ninety percent of the doctors are in urban areas. Rural hospitals may have only one resident doctor, or even a single doctor who only visits the healthcare center periodically.

Infant mortality rates for Zimbabwe are quite high, with the number of deaths almost 52 per 1,000 live births. Recent estimates put the maternal mortality rate at 1,100 per 100,000.

Zimbabwean women – especially rural women – need their husband's consent under African customary law to make healthcare decisions. Medical professionals often require a spouse's consent, especially with procedures that affect reproductive organs, such as sterilization procedures.

Under Zimbabwean law, any woman over the age of 16 has the right to obtain and use contraceptives. Zimbabwe was the first sub-Saharan African country to actually experience a decline in fertility rates, from 6.5 in 1984 to 3.8 in 2000. The country also has one of the highest contraceptive prevalence rates in the region, with about 42 percent of married women of childbearing age using some form of birth control.

Interesting Social Customs

Zimbabwean marriage customs involve a series of payments by the groom's family to the bride's family to secure the services of the bride. One of the most important services that the bride is expected to provide is giving birth to children. This practice is known as *lobola* (bride price) and is sometimes used by men to justify domestic violence against women, since paying *lobola* ensures that a man has total ownership over the woman, children, and property.

Women in Business

General View

Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs are major contributors to Zimbabwe's economy and have been a significant force in the country's development. The growth of the country's female entrepreneurs has been particularly rapid in the area of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Although independence held the promise of a new beginning and the government introduced laws removing all forms of discrimination, practices on the ground have remained the same. Women, however, are making their presence felt in the informal sector, with large numbers supplementing their family's income by running small, informal businesses, mostly in the agricultural sector.

Legal Rights

Zimbabwean women earned the right to vote in 1957, when colonial rulers still ran the country. Zimbabwe's Constitution prohibits discrimination against women in any form and gives them equal rights in owning property and businesses. As a practical matter, however, the situation is quite different. Only 23 percent of the women in communal areas have access to land rights and many married women have no land rights except through their husbands.

World Bank statistics indicate that female employees in Zimbabwe are paid 13 percent less than their male counterparts.

Women in Professions

Women in Zimbabwe are mostly involved in domestic work and running small businesses. A vast majority of women, especially those in rural areas, work in the agricultural sector. Women owned 75 percent of all small businesses in 1991, but by 1998 that figure had dropped to 58 percent, from a combination of discrimination by lenders in granting credit and increased competition.

Prominent Zimbabwean women include Irene Ndai Nyamakura, the managing director of the Zimbabwe Publishing House, and Esinet Mapondera, the National Secretary and President of the Zimbabwe Women's Bureau, the chairwoman of the Zimbabwe Women Business Promotion and the founder and chairman of the Zimbabwe Women Finance Trust. Women are not barred from any profession, although most women are in the lower echelons of Zimbabwe's work force.

Female relatives and other adults often assume childcare duties for working mothers. There is no state-sponsored childcare in Zimbabwe, although certain day-care centers were started through a collaboration between private and government agencies.

Women as Business Owners

Many Zimbabwean women own their own businesses, and micro- and small enterprises are dominated by women. Businesses run by women focus mostly on textiles, food processing, leather works, and retail sub-sectors. Many other women-run businesses focus on the agricultural sector and related products.

Businesswomen Visiting the Country

Zimbabwean men have no issues in doing business with a foreign businesswoman. They are friendly, warm, and usually a little formal in their manners. Zimbabweans prefer to develop trust in a relationship before doing business.

In a business setting, people usually greet each other with a handshake and a greeting that varies depending on the time of the day. Topics in a business meeting are most likely to revolve around business, work, and current affairs. Do not talk politics at business meetings. In social settings, Zimbabweans may ask extremely personal questions regarding one's income, age, love life, political affiliation, and the cost of one's car or watch. Avoid public displays of emotions.

It is advisable to dress smartly, since most people are judged by their dress. Even unemployed people will dress smartly and try to look like they are employed.