

Eritrea

Population	4 841 773
Female population (as % of total population)	51.0
Women's life expectancy (in years)	60.3
Men's life expectancy (in years)	55.6
Fertility rate (average births per female)	5.0



Degree of gender discrimination (based on SIGI quintile)

Low	Low/medium	Medium	Medium/high	High
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Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1991, after 30 years of war. During the conflict, the central leadership of the country (the Eritrean People's Liberation Front) made efforts to introduce the National Democratic Program, a platform to challenge gender inequality. Eritrea's Constitution and Transitional Civil Code of Eritrea (TCE) now prohibit discrimination against women, however, as yet, the laws are not always fully implemented due to lack of capacity in the country's legal system.

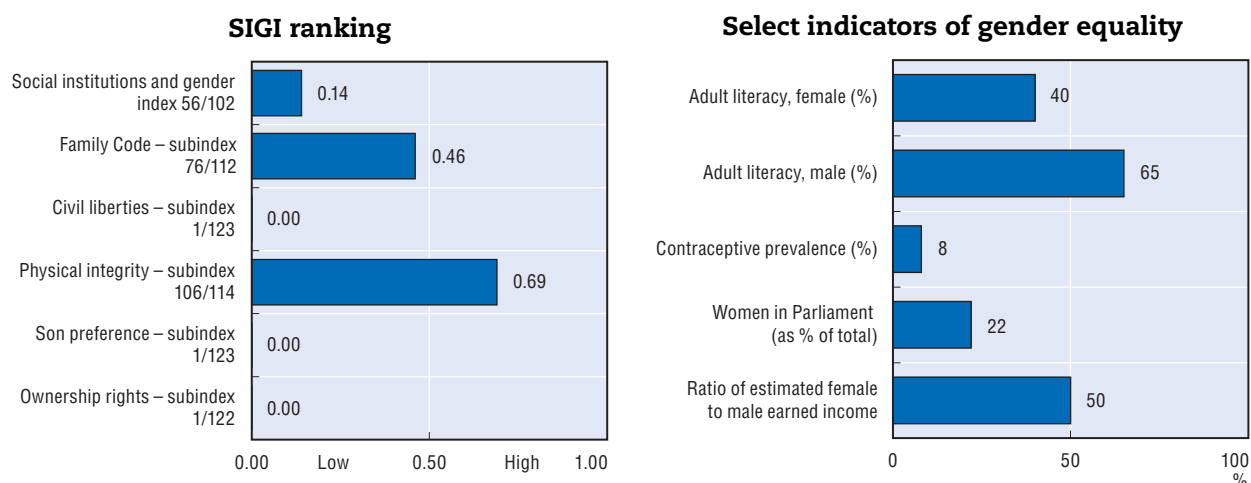
Much of Eritrean society remains traditional and patriarchal; men retain privileged access to education, employment, and control of economic resources. As a result, women have an inferior status to men in both their homes and communities. Such disparities are more common and more extreme in rural areas than in cities.

Family code

In 1991, the TCE abolished previously discriminatory clauses in existing legislation. Today, the law gives women a relatively high level of protection within the family. The TCE recognises three types of marriage: civil, religious and customary. The code explicitly states that all three types follow several binding conditions enhancing women's rights, including setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 years (not applicable to marriages governed by Sharia). Despite this condition, early marriage is pervasive. According to a 2004 United Nations report, 38% of girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed. For the most part, customary marriage disregards the TCE's minimum age condition and sets its own, much lower minimums: the age for girls is 8 to 15 and that for boys is 12 to 15. According to the Demographic and Health Survey, the median age at first marriage for women in Eritrea has risen steadily in recent years. The median age is now 18 years among women aged 20 to 24. Despite the formal illegality of polygamy, Sharia permits polygamous unions for Muslim men.

The Constitution accords parental authority to both parents, along with equal rights. However, in most cases, fathers are still considered as head of the household and are given right of custody.

Eritrean law does not discriminate in relation to inheritance rights. However, the Muslim community follows Sharia under which women may inherit from most of their family members, but their share is generally only half of that to which men are entitled.



Physical integrity

Women in Eritrea have relatively low protection for their physical integrity. Violence against women is widespread, particularly domestic violence and wife beating. It was estimated in 2001 that more than 65% of women in the Asmara area had been victims of domestic violence. Rape is punishable by law, with a maximum sentence of imprisonment of up to 15 years.

Female genital mutilation is widespread in Eritrea, and is practised by almost all ethnic and religious groups. According to the US Department of State, about 89% of women in Eritrea undergo FGM. To date, there is no law prohibiting the practice, but several groups are taking steps in a positive direction. The Eritrean government and other organisations sponsor education programmes that discouraging the practice.

The population sex ratio in Eritrea has been stable for the past 20 years, indicating that it is not a country of concern regarding missing women.

Ownership rights

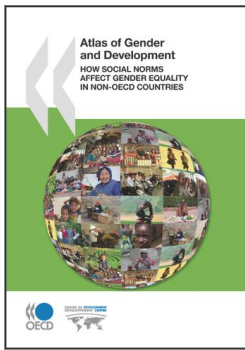
The Eritrean Constitution provides for full ownership rights for women, but the application of legal provisions tends to favour men and limit women's ability to achieve financial independence. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front established a policy on land redistribution to improve women's access to land by granting extensive land rights to divorced, widowed and childless women. Despite this effort to institutionalise land rights, many women still lack the means of working the land and face specific difficulties, especially in regions in which cultural norms prevent women from clearing land. With regard to access to property other than land, Eritrean women have equal rights to conclude contracts, administer property and run businesses. According to business licensing office statistics, women own around 30% of businesses.

Women in Eritrea also have access to bank loans. Most micro-credit programmes are open to both men and women; however, some programmes provide greater encouragement to women.

Civil liberties

Women in Eritrea have a high degree of civil liberty. The law guarantees freedom of movement to both men and women. Women are, however, restricted in that deeply rooted traditions expect women to hold the domicile of their husbands.

There are no legal limitations to the women's freedom of dress.



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