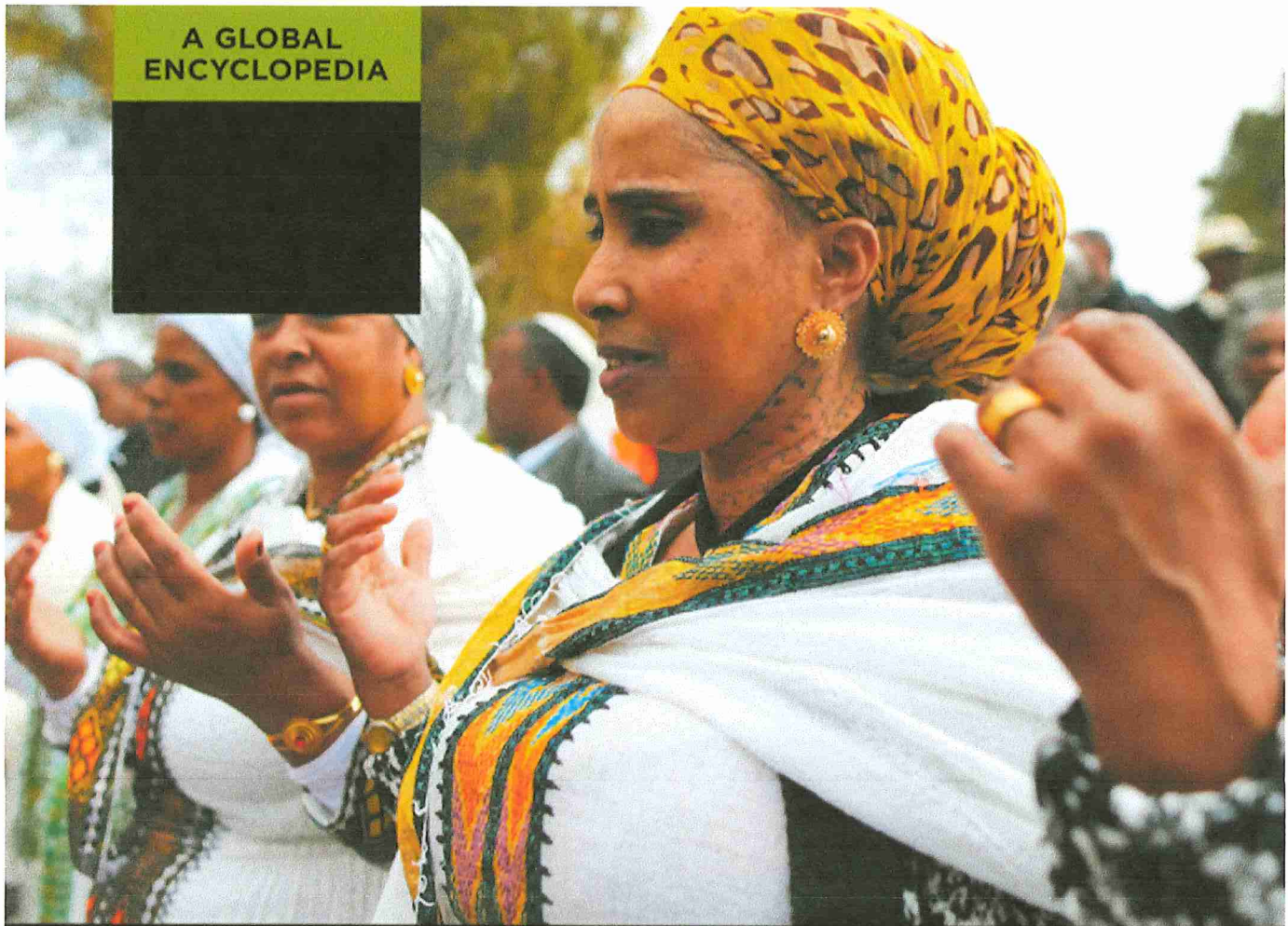


A GLOBAL  
ENCYCLOPEDIA



# WOMEN'S LIVES

— AROUND THE WORLD —



Susan M. Shaw, General Editor, and Nancy Staton Barbour,  
Patti Duncan, Kryn Freehling-Burton, and Jane Nichols, Editors

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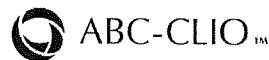
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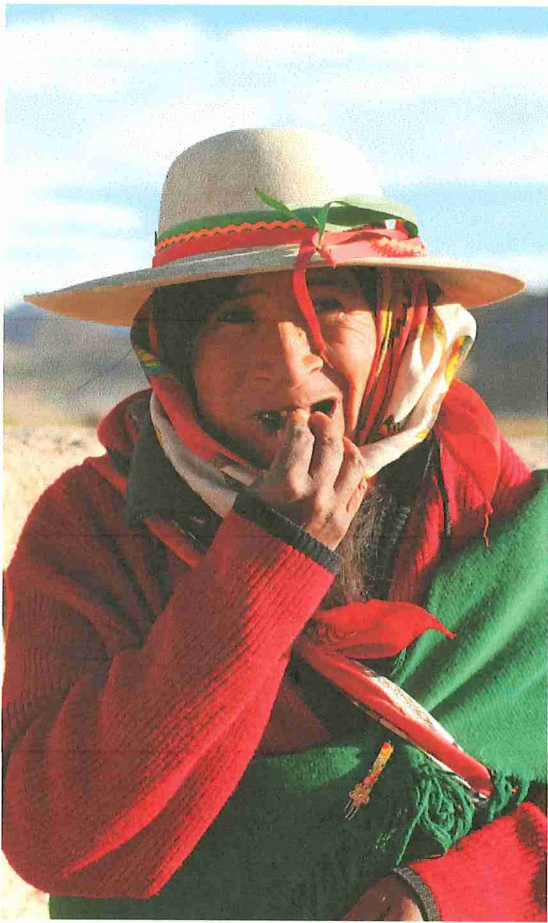
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Indigenous woman living in the Andes Mountains in Argentina. Rural women living in Argentina tend to experience higher rates of poverty than their urban counterparts. (Feije Riemersma/Dreamstime.com)



Señora Susanna, pictured here with some of her grandchildren, is a respected elder in the Maleku community of Costa Rica. She helps maintain knowledge about traditional Maleku customs, spiritual beliefs, history, and rituals, by passing down that knowledge to her extended kin. (Jillian M. Duquaine-Watson)

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## Costa Rica

### Overview of Country

The Republic of Costa Rica is located in Central America, bordered by Nicaragua (north), Panama (south), the Caribbean Sea (east), and the Pacific Ocean (west). It is inhabited by nearly 5 million people, approximately half female and half male. Racially and ethnically, the population is

quite homogeneous: 94 percent identify as white (*mestizos*, or those of mixed Spanish heritage) and the remainder as Afro-Caribbean (3%), Chinese (1%), foreign-born residents (1%), and indigenous (1%). Spanish is the official language, although many *ticos* and *ticas* (the Costa Rican terms for males and females, respectively) also speak English. Indigenous populations retain their tribal languages, but most also speak Spanish. Approximately three-fourths of the population identifies as Catholic. Other religions include Evangelical, Protestant, Jehovah's Witness, and indigenous belief systems.

Costa Rica is socially progressive, democratic, pro-human rights, and environmentally conscious. Latin America's most democratically developed country, it ranks 22nd overall in the world in this regard (*The Economist* 2012). It is referred to as "the Switzerland of Central America," a moniker that depicts it as democratic and stable while simultaneously dissociating it from the violence, armed conflict, and criminal activity, such as drugs, organized crime, and human trafficking, that are often associated with the region. Catholicism maintains a strong presence in the country; yet, it lacks much of the fervor often found in other Latin American countries. Other religions are accepted. Costa Rica is decidedly pacifist and has not had a military since 1949. Its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is USD\$12,000 (UN Population Fund 2012), and its comprehensive public education and public health systems have led to high literacy rates, life expectancy of nearly 80 years, and low infant and child mortality rates. Costa Rica scores well in the Human Development Index (HDI) in regard to income, education, and health (Malik 2013). Its conservation efforts are ambitious and include the designation of approximately 25 percent of the country's landmass as protected within the national park system. Indeed, its environmental agenda has become a model for countries throughout the world (Evans 1999, 7).

Yet, there is much more to the country and its people. As a small developing nation, Costa Rica remains vulnerable within the global economic and political landscape. Poverty rates have remained around 20 percent for the past two decades (INEC 2011). There are also persistent inequalities. In addition, there is an ongoing struggle with foreign influence, including from political and economic partners, multinational corporations, and the over 2 million tourists that visit the country every year. This has strained the country's natural resources, raised questions about future development, and altered tico (Costa Rican) culture and identity.

## Biodiversity and History

Costa Rica is perhaps best known for its natural environment and biodiversity. It occupies one-third of 1 percent of the earth's landmass, yet boasts a concentration of plant and animal species that is unparalleled. Five percent of the animal species on earth are found in this subtropical country, including hundreds that are endemic. There are over 300,000 insect species. Plant species are similarly plentiful and include approximately 2,000 species of trees and 1,200 species of orchids (Living National Treasures 2014). In addition, the landscape is diverse and includes tropical, deciduous, mangrove, and cloud forests; Pacific and Caribbean coastlines; numerous volcanoes, including six active and dozens of dormant; and a total of 12 climatic zones. There are two main seasons: the wet or rainy season (May–November) and the dry or green season (December–April).

Costa Rica's biodiversity and natural beauty prompted Spanish explorers to dub it "the rich coast" and claim it as a colony in the 16th century. Costa Rica remained under Spanish control until the early 19th century, when it joined other Central American nations to declare independence. In 1823, it established itself as a separate nation. By the 1900s, Costa Rica was a democratic society with an established infrastructure, public education system, free elections (for white males only), and a growing economy based primarily on coffee production and export. Bolstered by the construction of a railroad system in the 1880s, the cheap labor of Afro-Caribbean and Chinese migrants, and investment from foreign corporations and governments, agricultural production and export continued to expand into the 20th century. Following social unrest and a brief civil war in the 1940s, a new constitution was adopted in 1949. This signaled an era of peace, social progress, and civic participation that continues to be associated with the country.

## Overview of Women's Lives

Costa Rica consistently ranks high on the Social Institutions & Gender Index (SIGI). It also scores well on the Gender Gap Index and, in 2013, ranked 31st out of 136 countries, received an overall score of 0.724 out of a possible 1.00, and earned particularly high scores in the areas of education and political empowerment (World Economic Forum 2013). In addition, legislation prohibits all forms of discrimination and promotes gender equality. There has also been significant attention to gender-related issues

due, partly, to the active women's movement. Yet, policies are not always enforced, and there is some resistance to changing gender roles. At present, gender norms in Costa Rica are in flux, a consequence of ongoing economic development as well as international tourism.

### Girls and Teens

Costa Rica, with almost 40 percent of its population under the age of 24, can be considered a young country (CIA 2016). Females make up just under half of this population.

A recent survey of almost 10,000 adolescents ranked their foremost concerns as environmental damage, security, discrimination, arts, sports and recreation, poverty, and engagement (UNICEF 2015). Young people face additional concerns related to education, drug use, and domestic violence.

Despite these challenges young activists are making their impact felt. In one area, for example, the LGBTI rights organization Centro de Investigación y Promoción para América Central de Derechos Humanos (Center of Research and Promotion for Human Rights in Central America, or CIPAC) promotes cultural acceptance and knowledge about their community. Due to their and others' efforts, Costa Rica now recognizes May 17 as a National Day against Homophobia, and the Ministry of Education designates a day to educating students about homophobia and transphobia (Abelove 2015).

### Education

Education is a priority and regarded as a means to promote social equality and the social and economic development of the nation. Gender has long been at the core of public and political discourse regarding education. In 1847, legislation established that the government had an obligation to provide equal education to males and females. Education was made free and obligatory for all Costa Rican citizens in 1869. Although considerable disparities in access were part of the educational landscape well into the 1980s, at present, access to education is good overall, and females have high rates of participation at both public and private institutions. Costa Rica is regarded as having achieved full equality in regard to gender and educational participation (World Economic Forum 2013). The overall adult literacy rate is 97 percent, and literacy rates are marginally higher among females than males (UNICEF 2013).

At the primary level, females and males enroll in school, attend school, and successfully complete their courses of study at similar rates. At the secondary and university levels, females have slightly higher rates of matriculation and degree attainment (INEC 2011; UNICEF 2014). Compulsory education includes a total of nine years: six at the primary level (with Cycle I includes grades 1–3 and Cycle II includes grades 4–6) and three years at the secondary level (Cycle III includes grades 7–9). Those who complete Cycles I–III and pass the national exam may elect to participate in a one- or two-year program, either technical training or academic/college prep. The school calendar includes two terms. Students generally take competency and proficiency exams at the end of each term. The school day in public institutions is typically four hours at the primary level. It is longer at the secondary level, up to seven hours.

### School Completion and Dropout Rates

School completion and dropout rates remain a concern. Over 95 percent of Costa Ricans successfully complete primary school (UN Population Fund 2012). However, only 47 percent of those who begin secondary education successfully complete their course of study (Programa Estado de la Nación 2013). The national average for school attendance is 8.4 years. Although this represents a gain of more than 3 years of average schooling from 1980 data, it demonstrates that many do not complete the state-mandated educational requirement (UNDP 2013). At present, only 35.37 percent of adults have completed secondary school, and illiteracy rates are highest among adult populations, particularly those aged 45 and older (Aguilera 2013). There is a strong correlation between school completion and employment patterns: those with less education are overrepresented in low-paying jobs in the service and agricultural sectors (Monge-Naranjo 2007).

Adolescents from low-income families and rural communities are most likely to discontinue their education, and dropout rates are higher among males than females (Ocampo 2003). Among those female students who do drop out of school, reasons typically relate to economic pressures and the need to contribute to the household economy. In addition, while most communities do have an elementary school, secondary schools are concentrated in areas with higher populations (Monge-Naranjo 2007). The cost and time associated with transportation for children from rural communities can be a burden

and may contribute to dropout rates. Furthermore, teen pregnancy is an ongoing concern (Mainiero 2010). Teen mothers have high dropout rates despite various efforts to encourage them to stay in school (Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas 2009). Among indigenous students, the discriminatory treatment they encounter—such as nicknames, social isolation, and the sexual objectification of indigenous females—from nonindigenous classmates and teachers may threaten their resolve to stay in school (Stocker 2005, 141–168). Sexism, like racism, in school settings remains an ongoing concern, particularly in the form of gender stereotypes and sexist language in the approved public education curriculum (Osborne 2013).

Among those who do remain in school and take the exam that marks the completion of their compulsory education, females and males pass the exam at equivalent rates. However, students from low-income backgrounds and those attending rural schools are less likely to do so (Davis 2008). It has been suggested that this is due to the scarcity of schools and lower quality of instruction in rural public schools (Navarro 2014).

## Health

### Access to Health Care

Health is a priority in Costa Rica, and the average life expectancy is 78 years overall (75.59 years for males and 81.01 years for females), higher than other Latin American countries and comparable to industrialized nations (CIA 2014). Health care is provided to all citizens under a public system that covers provider fees and prescriptions. Citizens may also purchase private insurance and, in doing so, utilize the services of private providers and avoid the long waits associated with the public system.

Access to facilities and providers is much better in urban centers such as San Jose and Liberia, especially for illnesses and conditions requiring highly specialized care (such as cancer) or surgery. Public health programs, such as the introduction of paramedics, vaccines, nutrition programs, sanitation programs, and oral health initiatives, have expanded in recent years, particularly in rural areas, and have contributed to improved overall health in Costa Rica. So-called alternative or natural remedies are widely accepted in Costa Rica, and it is common to incorporate herbal and homeopathic remedies as well as acupuncture, chiropractic, and religious rituals into health care practices (Biesanz et al. 1999).

## Maternal Health

Costa Rica's maternal mortality rate (MMR), the annual number of deaths per 100,000 live births, was estimated at 25 in 2015, down from 40 in 2010 (CIA 2016). During pregnancy, 97 percent of women visit a health care provider four or more times and at 99 percent, almost all women have a skilled health care provider present while giving birth (UNICEF 2014). Breastfeeding is not very common, as just 18 percent of women exclusively breastfed their children for up to six months during 2008–2012 (UNICEF 2013). To support and encourage women who do choose to breastfeed, about 50 women staged a “mamaton” protest, where they publicly breastfed in a mall after mall personnel had asked a woman to use a lactation room rather than nurse in public. President Laura Chinchilla shared her support by calling the mall's action “unjust.” Along with other supporters, she advocates for women to nurse, and by doing so, she promotes upholding Chile's current law that mandates time for mothers to nurse or pump breast milk (Associated Press 2013).

## Diseases and Disorders

Dengue fever and chikungunya are of significant concern, as due in part to climate change, they have each recently spiked, according to Costa Rica's health minister. Dengue cases were recorded in 73 of 81 cantons and chikungunya in 45 (Arias 2016). Cancers and cardiovascular and other noncommunicable diseases are the causes of 83 percent of total deaths (WHO 2016). Alcoholism is an ongoing concern, and rates of tobacco use are increasing.

## Sexual and Reproductive Health

Maternal mortality and morbidity rates in Costa Rica are among the lowest in Latin America and comparable to rates found in some industrialized nations (World Bank 2014). Contraceptive use is widespread, and approximately 81 out of 100 partnered heterosexual women of childbearing age use oral contraceptive pills. Females typically have their first sexual experience between the ages of 15 and 20. Their first sexual partner is, on average, 11 years older, and nearly 60 percent report not using contraception during their first sexual intercourse (Social Watch 2014). The rural province of Guanacaste has the highest rate of genital chlamydia trachomatis infection in the country and one of the highest in Latin America, with 14 percent of young women ages 18–25 testing positive. Infection rates

are higher among women who are unmarried, use intrauterine devices, are less educated, and have multiple sexual partners (Porrás et al. 2008).

HIV infection rates remain relatively low in the country, but they are steadily increasing, with gay men and sex workers experiencing the highest known infection rates. Infection rates are believed to be underreported (Sullivan 2006). The continuous ebb and flow of international tourists, particularly those who seek pleasure among traditional sex workers and the growing number of female tourists who form short-term romantic and sexual relationships with locals, is also a factor in the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Romero-Daza and Freidus 2008). Teen pregnancy rates are also an ongoing concern, and births to teen mothers account for 20 percent of all births. Rates are highest in rural areas, are often associated with sexual abuse and domestic violence, and have raised concerns about illegal abortions (*La Nación* 2013).

### Gender-Based Violence

Violence against women continues to be widespread in Costa Rica. In a 2004 survey of ticas, nearly 60 percent of participants indicated they had experienced sexual or physical violence during their adult years, and perpetrators were most often male family members or close acquaintances (Sagot and Cabañas 2010). Despite legislation that prohibits domestic violence and Costa Rica's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other international and regional agreements that include provisions regarding violence against women, there is a cultural attitude of acceptance about such matters, and laws are often not enforced. Critics point to gender socialization and the cultural social hierarchy of gender as key factors in the perpetuation of such violence (Sagot and Cabañas 2010).

Violence against women in Costa Rica takes a variety of forms, including domestic violence, sexual abuse, marital rape, sexual harassment, forced prostitution, attacks on migrant women, torture, and femicide (Fabrikant 2003). Gender-based violence also includes attacks on and murders of members of the LGBTQI community, individuals who are regarded by many as nonconformists or as violating gender norms (Lester 2012).

Human trafficking is also an ongoing concern, and rates are increasing. Costa Rica serves as both an origin point and destination for human trafficking victims. Many victims are also trafficked through Costa Rica on their way to

other countries in the region. Young women and children are most often the victims (the average age of victims is 12 years old), and while some are trafficked for labor or as part of the illegal international adoption trade, most are trafficked into urban areas to work in the country's sex industry (Protection Project 2014).

## Employment

### Gender Equity in Employment

The World Economic Forum (2013) ranked Costa Rica 29th of 132 countries in overall gender equity, but only 99th in the category of "Economic Opportunity and Participation." Gender-based discrimination is pervasive in the realm of employment, including in hiring, pay, promotion, and treatment of workers (United Nations 2003). Women's employment has steadily increased over the past two decades, and nearly half of all women work for wages, including residents and immigrants, both legal and illegal, and comprise over 40 percent of nonagricultural workers (World Bank 2014). Only one-third of female workers have attended college or technical school, 20 percent attempted but did not complete secondary-level education, and nearly 10 percent attempted but did not complete primary school (Monge-Naranjo 2007).

Regardless of educational attainment, women continue to participate in the labor force at rates lower than males. Nearly one-fifth of working women are considered to be "vulnerable" and to experience unsafe or difficult working conditions, to have informal working agreements, or to be unpaid family workers. Women also face higher rates of unemployment: 10.5 percent compared to the overall unemployment rate of 7.6 percent (World Bank 2014).

### Inequality and Disparities in the Workplace

Occupational segregation by gender is widespread. Some regard this as the result of traditional gender norms that discourage women from participating in particular fields (Osborne 2013). Females tend to be concentrated in the service sector, including as domestic help, child care workers, and especially tourism. The female labor force is distributed as follows: 85 percent in service, 11 percent in industry, and 4 percent in agriculture. In addition, women comprise one-third of the total workforce and half of the informal sector workforce (World Bank 2014).

The labor market is further segregated along racial and ethnic lines. Afro-Caribbean women living in the area of

Limón are concentrated in caretaking fields such as nursing and teaching, while their white counterparts work in industries. Wages for teachers and nurses are typically higher than wages for industrial work, but Afro-Caribbean women are more economically vulnerable if social services budgets are reduced (McIlwane 1997). Similarly, Nicaraguan immigrant women—both legal and illegal—are concentrated in the informal sector, including housekeepers, laundresses, cooks, and nannies (Gindling 2008). These jobs carry low status and low wages, may provide only intermittent and inconsistent income, and do not provide opportunities for advancement (Osborne 2013). Indigenous women tend to be concentrated in the informal labor sector (Vinding and Kampbel 2012). Those indigenous women that do engage in formal-sector employment are likely to find themselves overrepresented in the agricultural industry, specifically on fruit plantations, where exposure to pesticides may diminish their respiratory health (Feitan et al. 2009).

The gender wage gap persists and is more pronounced in the private sector than the public (United Nations 2003). When employed in the same fields, men tend to earn more than women, particularly in agricultural work, finance, health care, education, social work, and the hospitality industry (Tijdens and Van Klaveren 2012). Although the wage gap appears largest for those who face barriers in the attainment of skills, education, and training, it persists even when employees have comparable traits in these areas (Monge and Gonzalez 2005). In labor fields with the highest level of gender disparity, white males disproportionately occupy supervisory positions (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2013).

Legislation such as the Law for Promotion of Women's Social Equality and the Law against Sexual Harassment in Employment and Teaching promote gender equality in the workplace. Yet, they are not always enforced. In addition, aspects of labor laws may disadvantage female employees. Article 88 of the Law for Promotion of Women's Social Equality restricts women in most fields from late-night work. This effectively bans women from higher-paying shifts or in jobs such as call centers (World Bank 2014).

### **Recent Changes in the Costa Rican Economy and Labor Market**

During the past three decades, the transition from an economy based primarily on agricultural exports to an

economy of service and industry has led to economic growth and the expansion of the middle class. The country's economy was primarily based on agricultural production and the export of coffee, banana, pineapples, sugar palm oil, cocoa, and beef during the 20th century. In the three decades from 1950 to 1980, there was sustained and healthy economic growth.

This economic growth came to an abrupt halt with the economic crisis of the 1980s. The crisis was the result of a combination of factors. These factors included a monoculture economy of dependent capitalist production that relied primarily on agricultural exports. Other factors were increasing reliance on technology, increasing expansion of the middle class, the growth of consumption and importation, the lingering ripple effects of the international economic crisis of the 1970s and the resulting Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the influence of foreign multinational corporations, and Costa Rica's "chronic and growing deficit" (Mas 2004, 217). Consequently, the economy plummeted. The colón, Costa Rica's currency, was devalued. GDP dropped by more than 50 percent, salaries decreased an average of 40 percent, and one-tenth of adults were unemployed. Inflation soared to over 80 percent, and national debt increased threefold, making it nearly equivalent to the country's GDP (Seligson and Muller 1987).

At present, the majority of workers are employed in the service industry, particularly in jobs related to the thriving ecotourism industry, which is the country's primary employment sector and income generator. Agriculture remains a significant employment sector, although this has decreased as the service sector has continued to expand. There is also an expanding industrial sector that includes electronics components, textiles and apparel, medical devices (such as heart valves), plastics, chemicals, and wood-related manufacturing (such as furniture or the processing of wood for construction purposes). The creation of a commercial corridor near the capital of San Jose has supported continued growth in this area. Call centers and other telephone-related service jobs are currently on the rise. Similarly, employment related to medical tourism continues to increase as more and more individuals from North America travel to Costa Rica to undergo procedures at a fraction of the cost, especially dental procedures (Warf 2010) and cosmetic surgery (Ackerman 2010). While most labor takes place in the formal sectors identified above, there is also an extensive informal labor market.

### Labor Laws and Employee Rights

Costa Rica's Código de Trabajo (Labor Code) includes numerous provisions intended to protect workers and promote their well-being. These include a minimum-wage scale that is updated biannually, may be established as a minimum per day or per month, and varies in amount depending on the job classification (Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social 2014). Employees are also guaranteed the right to paid vacation and paid holidays as well as sick leave. The maximum length of workday is also legislated, and employers are required to provide coverage for employees in the event of injury or job-related disability. In May 2014, the Social Security System board of directors voted unanimously to extend all social benefits to same-sex couples employed in the public sector, including employment-related benefits such as health insurance and pensions (Pomareda 2014).

Maternity leave includes a total of 120 days of paid leave, with the employer and the Social Security Administration each paying half of the employees' salary during this time. Maternity leave typically begins 30 days prior to the birth. It continues for an additional 90 days postpartum, a period that coincides with cultural beliefs about the importance of breastfeeding and the minimum length of time an infant should be breastfed following birth. Paid maternity leave can be extended for health reasons and with proper documentation from a health care provider. Fathers employed in the public sector are entitled to 8 days of paid paternity leave. Women who continue to breastfeed after returning to work are permitted breaks to breastfeed their child or to express breast milk. These breaks are, at minimum, 15 minutes for every 3 hours of work or two 30-minute breaks for a full workday. Labor unions are legal and widespread.

Despite these provisions, the attempts at union busting that began during the economic recession of the 1980s have continued into the 21st century (Banana Link 2003). In addition, labor code violations are common (ILWU 2010). Child labor is also a concern, particularly in the areas of domestic and agricultural labor. Child labor includes both voluntary and forced labor from native-born children as well as those who enter the country as migrants or as victims of human trafficking (U.S. Department of Labor 2012).

### Family Life

Family life is a central feature of Costa Rican society. Children are regarded as treasures or blessings, and there is

no strong son preference. Newborns are given two last names, one from each of their parents, in the tradition of bilateral descent. Family gatherings are common, including for celebrations, holidays, and family dinners and typically include extended families. Adults who do not have children may be pitied. Likewise, individuals who are not close with their families are often regarded as peculiar.

### Changing Family Dynamics and Household Composition

Traditional family life included distinct gender roles, something that was heavily influenced by the Catholicism found throughout the country and presence of attitudes of machismo and patriarchy. The father was the breadwinner and head of the household, while the mother was chiefly responsible for domestic duties such as cleaning, cooking, and childrearing. Women of the middle and upper classes typically hired lower-income women to do their household labor, a practice that is still common. Yet, the dynamics of the family are rapidly changing in Costa Rica, both in regard to family composition and gender roles. Marriage and fertility rates are declining. Rates of divorce and separation, the number of female-headed households, the number of single mothers, and the number of people living alone have all increased (INEC 2011).

In addition, as Costa Rica has been increasingly drawn into the global economy and as the tourism and industrial sectors have expanded, employment opportunities for women have also expanded. More women are working for wages and contributing a greater share to the household economy and national economy than previous generations (Monge-Naranjo 2007). While women and youth tend to support women's increasing economic role, older adult males are more likely to associate these changes with "family breakdown" and express concern over changing gender dynamics (Chant 2002). Among young men, changing gender dynamics may demand that they negotiate their own gender identity and sense of masculinity in ways that may be uncomfortable or unfamiliar (Chant 2001, 204–207; Mannon and Kemp 2010).

Similarly, changing gender norms may leave young women feeling caught between traditional and contemporary gender ideologies. For example, despite their increasing economic and decision-making roles within the family, women are still expected to be altruistic and self-sacrificing (Brickell and Chant 2010). Additionally, older women express concern about what they perceive to



be younger, professional women's diminished skills in the areas of housekeeping and especially the preparation of traditional foods such as *gallo pinto*, a rice-and-bean dish (Preston-Werner 2008).

### Female-Headed Households and Single Mothers

Since the late 1990s, there has been a steady increase in female-headed households. This coincides with increasing rates of cohabitation and declining rates of marriage (Esteve et al. 2012). It also coincides with increasing rates of births to unmarried women, which account for approximately one-half of all births (Palmer and Molina 2004, 361). Female-headed households comprise 27 percent of all households, 33.5 percent of all poor households, and 43.5 percent of households in extreme poverty (Chant 2009). Single mothers and their children experience poverty more than any other type of household (Gindling and Oviedo 2008). Social ostracism, low self-worth, and physical or sexual abuse from former partners and extended family members are common among single mothers (Budowski 2005, 18-19).

The 1998 Law for Women in Conditions of Poverty provides job training and personal development courses for single mothers. The Act on Services for Women Living in Poverty of 1998 established programs for poor women and an economic stipend for participants. Various child care programs have been created to assist single mothers. However, demand for such services far exceeds availability (Gindling and Oviedo 2008). The 2001 Law for Responsible Paternity requires mandatory DNA testing in cases where paternity is not voluntarily acknowledged. It also requires the father to grant the use of his surname and to pay pregnancy-related medical costs and food expenses for the child's first year of life (Barash 2012). However, mothers pursue DNA testing in only about one-third of cases (Budowski and Bixby 2003).

### Politics

Costa Rica is a constitutional democracy with three branches of government that operate via a system of checks and balances. Universal suffrage was established in 1949, and voting is mandatory for all citizens aged 18 and older, although only about 75 percent of eligible voters participate (International IDEA 2014). Citizens are generally well-informed about political matters. The political climate of the country has long been dominated

by discourses of democracy and human rights as well as an eye toward ongoing economic and social development. Internationally, the country has peaceful political relationships, including with its Central American neighbors with whom it has advanced an agenda of diplomacy. Recent examples include President Luis Alberto Monge's proclamation in 1983 affirming Costa Rica's status as neutral, despite pressure to become involved in the war in Nicaragua, as well as President Oscar Arias Sánchez's efforts to promote democracy among Central American nations, efforts that earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987. In the 21st century, Costa Rica also developed a strong relationship with China.

### Promoting Women's Equality

Costa Rica ranks 21st out of 136 countries in regard to women's political empowerment (World Economic Forum 2013). The 1949 constitution affords equal voting rights and political representation and prohibits discrimination in any form. In recent decades, laws have promoted gender equality in the areas of parental authority, marriage and divorce, bank loans and financial services, ownership of land and property, and protection from domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault. In addition, a variety of entities have been created to promote women's equality and the status of women in Costa Rica. These include the National Center for the Rights of Women and the Family and the National Women's Institute. Costa Rica also ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1986.

In response to concerns about the scarcity of women in politics, a quota system for candidates was enacted in 1988. It requires that women are 50 percent of candidates for political office and that female and male candidates be listed in alternating order on ballots. Women currently hold one-third of seats in the national legislature, and several serve in cabinet posts (Quota Project 2014). From 2010 to 2014, Laura Chinchilla Miranda served as the first female president of Costa Rica. Despite these achievements, female politicians continue to experience marginalization and to be relegated to the realm of women's issues (Schwindt-Bayer 2006). The women's movement in Costa Rica has been active and vocal, taking on a variety of public and personal issues. In the 1990s, various components of the women's movement sought to promote gender equality through a "revisioning" of Costa

Rican history to incorporate women, combating violence against women, promoting women in the arts and education, advocating for legal equality, and expanding women's leadership in politics, business, and finance (Leitinger 1997, 5–12).

### Religious and Cultural Roles

The influence of Roman Catholicism is felt throughout Costa Rica, although it would be an overstatement to suggest that religion dominates life. Churches are found in the center of most communities, and many cities are named after saints. It is common to attend weekly religious services or to attend church for religious celebrations such as Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter, but only a small portion—typically older generations, especially women—attend services or visit a church to pray on a daily basis. Thus, while religion does have a presence in Costa Rica, it does not dictate gender roles.

As a historically male-dominated society, Costa Rica still exhibits aspects of machismo that are common in other Latin American cultures, and the notion of females and males as fundamentally different from one another remains strong. Sexual harassment is common, both in employment and in public places, such as on the street, in parks, and on public transportation. Females employed in business, finance, and other sectors traditionally dominated by men can expect to encounter sexual harassment and may find their ideas dismissed or treated as inferior simply because they are female. In addition, female bosses may face challenges to their authority from male subordinates.

These behaviors stem, in part, from the lingering belief that women's appropriate roles are as wife and mother, and males should be breadwinners and the heads of the family. Yet, cultural gender roles are in flux, particularly as more young women continue to pursue higher education and enter the professional workforce. In addition, changing family composition due to increasing divorce rates and increasing incidence of births to single mothers has challenged traditional gender roles. Some regard this as beneficial and a positive move away from the restrictions placed on males and females of earlier generations. Yet, there is much concern over how such changes may contribute to a cultural crisis, particularly by emasculating men and causing women to abandon traditional family values (Mannon and Kemp 2010, Preston-Werner 2008).

## Issues

### Social Exclusion and Marginalization

Social exclusion and marginalization persist for many groups in Costa Rica, including indigenous communities, individuals of Afro-Caribbean descent, and immigrant populations. There are eight indigenous groups in Costa Rica, including the Maleku, Bribri, Chorotega, Huetare, Cabecare, Terraba (or Teribe), Boruca (or Brunca), and Guaymí tribes. Persecuted, raped, and murdered by colonizers and missionaries, these tribal communities managed to survive, albeit in dramatically reduced numbers and with significant loss of ancestral lands. Most now live on reserves scattered throughout the country. Although protected under Costa Rica's *Ley Indígena* (Indigenous Law) of 1977, they face ongoing threats to their sovereignty and land rights (Duquaine-Watson 2013; Forest Peoples Program 2013). Indigenous females experience higher rates of poverty, food insecurity, and illiteracy; have poorer health; and are less likely to complete primary education in comparison to nonindigenous women and indigenous males (Herforth 2007; Vinding and Kampbel 2012). Afro-Caribbean populations, especially from Jamaica, arrived in Costa Rica in the late 19th century and were welcomed as a source of cheap labor. Some have criticized the mainstream women's movement for failing to include the voices of Afro-Caribbean women and failing to attend to the ways in which their experiences are shaped at the intersection of sexism, racism, and classism (Foote 2004). In addition, Afro-Caribbean women continue to face stereotypes of hypersexuality and presumptions of biological differences that are a legacy of earlier centuries (Putnam 2002, 16).

In recent decades, many citizens of other Central American nations have immigrated to Costa Rica. Some arrived as refugees during periods of civil war, while others migrated with the hope of finding better job opportunities. Whereas immigrants from the United States and Europe continue to be welcomed and to be associated with wealth and economic opportunities, those from Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador are likely to experience disdain, hatred, and even violence (IDRC 2013; Mayer 2010). Immigrant women often find themselves relegated to the realm of domestic labor and are subject to long hours, low pay, and physical or sexual assault. They also struggle to resist assimilation and to raise their children with their own cultural values and identity (Quizar 1998, xvi).

### Maleku Women

The Maleku indigenous group includes approximately 700 individuals who live primarily on the Guatuso Indigenous Reserve in northern Costa Rica. The Maleku were quite successful in resisting conquest and colonization (Castillo Vásquez 2005). At present, they continue to rely on hunting, fishing, and subsistence agriculture. They maintain their own language, belief system, and traditions. However, like other indigenous groups in Costa Rica, the Maleku are being increasingly drawn into the country's commercial economy due to persistent, pervasive poverty as well as continuing assaults on their rights (Duquaine-Watson 2013).

Traditionally, women were responsible for gathering activities, household tasks, and child-rearing while men hunted. However, these roles were regarded as complementary. Large families were common until the 1970s, although now it is more common for Maleku families to have two or three children. At present, women continue to perform the majority of household labor and child-rearing, but they also work alongside men in agriculture, animal husbandry, the construction of homes and community structures, the creation of cultural artifacts such as masks and drums for sale, and the operation of souvenir shops. It is increasingly common for young adult women to work for wages, especially in jobs within Costa Rica's tourism industry.

The community has its own tribal council, and approximately half of council members are women. Female children are given the same educational opportunities as males and are encouraged to participate in extracurricular programs, such as athletics, arts, and personal development. In 2014, there was considerable pride among community members when a young Maleku woman was selected to represent Costa Rica at the Football for Hope Festival. This event was held in Caju, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in conjunction with the FIFA World Cup. Participants were chosen because of their leadership skills, contributions to their communities, and athletic ability.

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### Conclusion

Despite Costa Rica's diminutive size and its classification as a developing nation, the lives of women in the country are positively impacted by many factors. These factors include the country's dedication to providing social services—such as health care and education—for its citizenry as well as its steadily expanding economy. Overall, women in Costa Rica fare well in educational access and completion rates as well as political representation and participation. The discourse of women's rights in the country has expanded in recent decades, and this has promoted increased attention to gender equality, something that is reflected in federal legislation that prohibits gender discrimination. Quite simply, gender equality seems to be one component of broader discourses of democracy and human rights that are central to contemporary tico society.

Yet, there remains a gap between the promise of gender equality and the reality of women's lives in the country. Put another way, the ideology that supports gender equality does not necessarily translate into practice. This is reflected, for example, in gender disparities in employment and the ongoing and widespread problem of gender-based violence. Furthermore, it is clear that the needs

and experiences of women from socially marginalized groups—especially indigenous, immigrant, Afro-Caribbean, and low-income populations—have yet to be mainstreamed in the national gender agenda. As the country continues to promote economic development, industrialization, and foreign trade in the 21st century, it will be interesting to note the role that gender is afforded in its political and economic plans. Such plans have the potential to advance gender equality. Conversely, they could also reinforce and even exacerbate current issues facing women and girls throughout Costa Rica.

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## CUBA

### Overview of Country

Cuba is located in the Caribbean Sea, between Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula approximately 100 miles to the west and the island of Hispaniola (shared between Haiti and the Dominican Republic) 45 miles to the east. The island is approximately 93 miles south of Key West, Florida, and has a geographical area of 42,903 square miles (CIA 2014). Cuba's rich history extends back to around 8000 BCE, with the first of several groups of migrants from the mainland settling on the western side of the island. The indigenous tribes on the island, the Taíno-Arawaks, survived the arrival of the Spaniards and still inhabit remote areas of the Cuban countryside. Since the arrival of the Spanish in 1492, however, population demographics have shifted drastically due to Spanish immigration, indigenous genocide, and large-scale use of African slave labor on sugar and tobacco plantations.

The Spaniards brought with them a fervent Catholicism and a traditional Western European sociopolitical

hierarchy, within which women of all social classes were considered property, although some held more value than others, meaning that upper-class women of European heritage were not literally bought and sold like their African counterparts.

After the Spanish-American War (1898) and with help from the United States, Cubans won their independence from Spain in 1902. Between independence and 1959, Cuba was governed by authoritarian dictators, the last of which was Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar (1901–1973). Batista was a strong supporter of economic investors from the United States, and they returned the favor by supporting his run for power. Batista was forcibly removed from power on January 1, 1959, in a guerilla revolution led by Fidel Castro Ruz (1926–2016).

Upon gaining power, Castro, along with the various incarnations of what would eventually become the Communist Party of Cuba (*Partido comunista de Cuba*, PCC), enacted radical sociopolitical changes on the island, including securing funding by the Soviet Union for the new Cuban government. Another drastic change was to expel all capitalist enterprises from the island, many of which were highly lucrative for U.S. citizens. The negative economic consequences for these U.S.-based corporations, combined with rising U.S.-Soviet tensions, led to the U.S. strict trade embargo in 1961. Despite Castro's opposition to imperialism, including the Soviets, the economic hardship that would have befallen the island was narrowly avoided because of Soviet support of the Cuban Revolution (Taaffe 2005). The Soviet Union continued its economic and political influence until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR in 1991, when Cuba was effectively cut off from Soviet support.

At this point, Cuba entered what is known as the "Special Period in Peacetime." This *período especial*, which spanned most of the 1990s and has many lingering effects today, marked the downturn of Cuban politics and was characterized by severe economic hardship and food shortages. In the new millennium, Cuba has, to a small degree, pulled out of this economic slump, but not without significant change. In 2006, concerns for Castro's health called for his younger brother, Raúl (1931–), to take power. Raúl had previously served as minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces. This change in leadership, combined with Raúl's decision to step down in 2018, has signaled what many predict to be the end of Cuban socialism. Cuba is also undergoing changes due to President Barack Obama's (1961–) decision in 2014 to normalize U.S.-Cuban