

# Nicaragua

Population	5 604 596
Female population (as % of total population)	50.2
Women's life expectancy (in years)	76.0
Men's life expectancy (in years)	69.9
Fertility rate (average births per female)	2.8



## Degree of gender discrimination (based on SIGI quintile)

Low	<b>Low/medium</b>	Medium	Medium/high	High
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The 1987 Constitution of Nicaragua grants equal civil rights to all citizens and prohibits gender-based discrimination. The new Penal Code, adopted in 2001, introduced laws to prohibit and criminalise discriminatory acts. A second report on human development in Nicaragua, produced in 2002, noted significant progress in some areas. It stated that social and cultural behaviour was becoming less discriminatory, but domestic and sexual violence continued to undermine women's rights to a significant degree. Poverty is widespread in Nicaragua, but has the greatest impact on households headed by women in rural areas (about one-fifth of rural households).

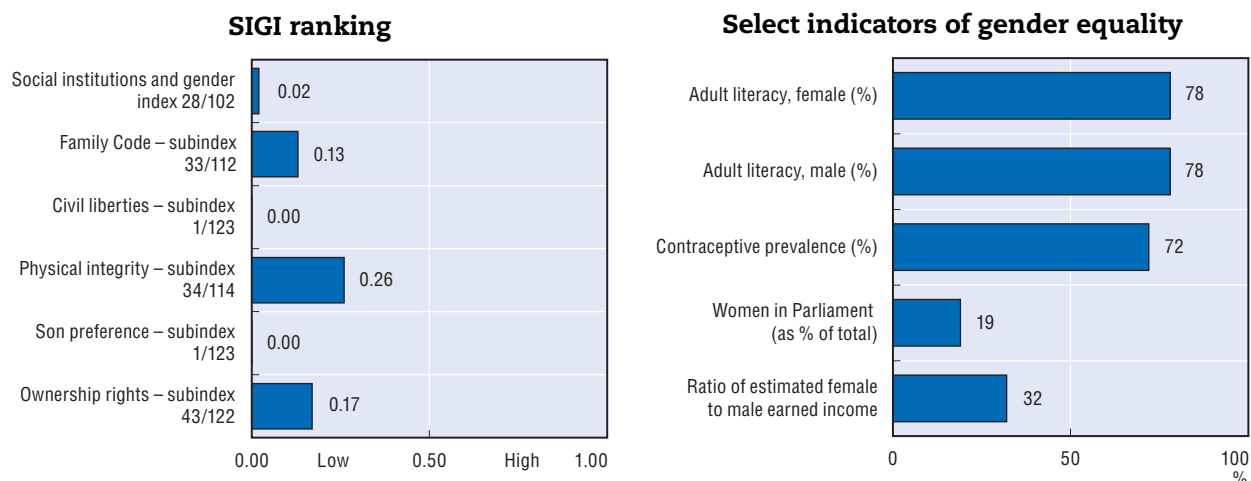
## Family code

The Nicaraguan Family Code is generally favourable towards women, but more progress is needed, especially in relation to early marriage. With parental authorisation, the minimum legal age for marriage is just 14 years for women and 15 years for men. Without such authorisation, it rises to 18 years for women and 21 years for men. The incidence of early marriage is high: a 2004 United Nations report estimated that 32% of girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed. Polygamy is not a common practice in Nicaragua.

The Nicaraguan Constitution states that family relations should be based on respect, solidarity and the absolute equality of rights and responsibilities for men and women. Legislation on parent-child relations grants mothers and fathers equal rights with regards to parental authority and to the education and care of their children. As for inheritance, the Constitution grants Nicaraguan men and women the same rights to inherit family-owned properties. As yet, this right is not enforceable by law.

## Physical integrity

The government is taking steps to enhance protection of the physical integrity of Nicaraguan women, but violence against women remains a problematic issue. A concerted effort to encourage the victims of violence to press charges appears to have been successful: the number of cases reported rose by one-third between 2001 and 2002. But sexual and domestic violence are still widespread, and more than half of the complaints concern violence within the family.



The general level of public insecurity has risen in Nicaragua, and one consequence is a higher incidence of rape. Rape is a crime under the current law, but many victims do not press charges for fear of social stigma. The law recognises spousal rape, but does not categorise it separately from other forms of the crime. Under Nicaragua's Penal Code, sexual harassment is punishable by up to two years in prison.

Female genital mutilation is not a common practice in Nicaragua, nor is there any evidence to suggest it is a country of concern in relation to missing women.

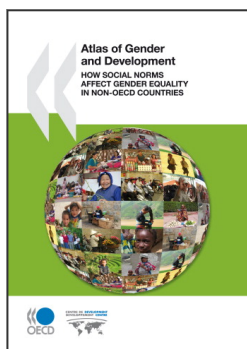
## Ownership rights

Recent advances have improved women's ownership rights in Nicaragua, but discrimination remains quite common. Land reform measures gave women the right to obtain access to land, and they now own about one-fifth of the country's agricultural units. However, their plots are generally smaller than those owned by men. Despite this progress, social prejudices persist: in reality, less than one-half of Nicaragua's female landowners have total control over the use of their land. Since the Civil Code was adopted in 1904, Nicaraguan women have had the same capacity as men to gain access to property other than land. Women are entitled to sign contracts and to administer property. A 1997 amendment to a law on property stability allowed couples to own joint property, thereby improving women's access to property other than land.

There is no legal restriction on women's access to bank loans, but discrimination does occur. Access to bank loans is restricted for the population as a whole but women have more difficulty borrowing and are typically granted smaller sums than men. Although the number of private and public banks offering loans to women is growing, about one-third of women in Nicaragua apply to micro-credit institutions and NGOs, and many others go to individual lenders.

## Civil liberties

The civil liberties of Nicaraguan women are quite well protected, but some restrictions are evident. Article 31 of the Constitution guarantees women freedom of movement, but the 1940 Civil Code states that married women must live in the residence of their husbands' choosing. There are no reported restrictions regarding freedom of dress for women in Nicaragua.



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