



# Indonesia Investments

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## Women in Indonesia

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**Van Der Schaar Investments B.V.  
CV Indonesia Investments**

# Indonesia Investments

Update – 20 April 2023

## ‘Kartini Day – The Role of Women in Indonesian Society Today’



# Preface

In addition to our reports, Indonesia Investments sends updates on key economic, political or social developments to our subscribers to make sure that our subscribers do not miss out on vital information. Topics in these updates will often be discussed in more detail (and in an updated form) in forthcoming monthly reports.

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## - Gender Issues -

# Kartini Day – A Good Occasion to Take a Look at the Role of Women in Indonesian Society and Economy

Each 21 April, Indonesia celebrates 'Kartini Day'. On this day, Indonesians remember the life and efforts of Raden Ayu Kartini, who has become a patriotic figure (national hero) and a symbol for (defending) women's rights (female education in particular) as well as gender equality.

### Who Was Kartini?

Kartini was born into an aristocratic Javanese family (one with a strong intellectual tradition) on 21 April 1879 in Jepara (in the province of Central Java) at a time when Java was still part of the Dutch colony. The father of Kartini, Sosroningrat, managed to obtain a high position in the political structure as he was a Regent (*Bupati*) for the Regency of Jepara. Being part of the indigenous elite, helped Kartini to attend school (which was relatively rare at the time, especially for an indigenous girl).

But when Kartini turned 12, she was secluded at home (this was a common practice among young female Javanese nobles, to prepare her for wedlock). During seclusion, girls were not allowed to leave their parents' house until they were married, which implied that authority over them would be transferred from fathers to the husbands.

During seclusion, Kartini continued to self-educate herself. Being fluent in Dutch, she was able to read books, newspapers, and European magazines that fed her interest in Europe, in feminist thinking, and also triggered a desire to improve conditions of indigenous Indonesian women, which at the time had a low social status. During that time she acquired several pen pals in the Netherlands.



Kartini married Joyodiningrat (the Regent of Rembang, who already married three wives; polygyny being common at the time) in 1902. This marriage was arranged by her parents. Fortunately, Joyodiningrat was supportive of her aspirations, and so allowed her to set up a women's school in Rembang. However, a few days after Kartini gave birth to her only child, she died at the age of 25.

After Kartini's death, Dutch lawyer, author, and Dutch parliament member Conrad Theodor van Deventer (who became known as the spokesman of the Dutch Ethical Policy Movement) established the R.A. Kartini Foundation, which built schools for women in various Indonesian cities starting from 1912. Van Deventer was friends with Kartini's father, and had in fact met Kartini (once) during a visit to her house when she was twelve years old.

Meanwhile, J.H. Abendanon, the Minister for Culture, Religion, and Industry in the East Indies, collected and published the letters that Kartini had sent to her pen pals in Europe. These letters were released in a book titled *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (Out of Dark Comes Light) and was published in 1911. This book attracted great interest in the Netherlands, and Kartini's ideas began to change the way the Dutch viewed native women in Java. Her ideas also provided inspiration for prominent Indonesian figures in the fight for independence. Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, declared Kartini a national hero in 1964. He also declared her birth date (21 April) as "Kartini Day".



## Women's Role in Indonesian Society Today

Having this year's Kartini Day in mind (21 April 2023), it is a good occasion to take a closer look at the role of women in Indonesia, today.

When we read publications released by the World Bank, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Human Rights Watch in recent years, the general picture is that Indonesia has made considerable progress (over the past two decades) toward gender equality, with improved rates of literacy, school enrolment, and employment (including in politics), as well as the introduction of policies that pave the way for a more gender-equitable society.

That said, there remain various areas of concern. For example, the negative impact of child marriage on the future of Indonesian girls. Or women being overrepresented in the country's informal sector (where workers typically receive lower wages and lack social protection as well as access to healthcare). Meanwhile the gender pay gap exists in most sectors. Lastly, women are still underrepresented in top jobs (such as in politics, and CEO level positions).

When many women in society are confined to the house, or, are not equipped with certain skills or education, it actually means that there is a huge untapped potential in Indonesia. For example, the World Bank stated that, if Indonesia could increase

female labour force participation by only 25 percent by 2025, then it could generate an additional USD \$62.0 billion in economic activity, thereby increasing Indonesia's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2.9 percent.

[...]

This is the introduction of the article (the article consists of 45 pages). To get the full article (an electronic article, in a PDF) you can contact us by sending an email to [info@indonesia-investments.com](mailto:info@indonesia-investments.com), or, a message to +62.882.9875.1125 (including WhatsApp).

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