

Gender Equality in Nepal

Facts and Figures



Government of Nepal
Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens
Singha Durbar, Kathmandu



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मा. भगवती चौधरी
मन्त्री

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नेपाल सरकार
Government of Nepal



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पत्र संख्या (Letter No.)

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Foreword

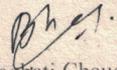
It is a great pleasure for me to know that the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens in collaboration with National Statistics Office and other relevant government agencies has prepared and is about to publish a booklet "Gender Equality in Nepal: Facts and Figures" through 'Development for Gender Equality' program.

There has been a significant development in women's empowerment and awareness of women's rights as a result of various political changes in Nepal. The Constitution of Nepal and other laws have made various policy arrangements to build a gender-equitable and just society, and relevant programs have been conducted by the government for this. Such arrangements have also substantially improved the indicators of gender equality.

The interpretation of the information and statistics presented in this publication, linked to government policy making and implementation, seems to be useful in measuring the progress made in the field of gender equality along with the changes that have occurred over time. I hope that this will help the people's representatives of federal, provincial and local governments, policy makers, non-governmental organizations, scholars and those involved in policy making who work in the field of gender equality and upliftment in Nepal.

I would like to express my special gratitude to the Norwegian government for providing the necessary technical and financial support for this publication. Likewise, I would like to thank to the employees of this ministry and other government agencies involved in this, and to all the facilitators and experts of the Norwegian government.

April 2024


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Acknowledgements

It gives me pleasure to introduce the publication "Gender Equality in Nepal: Facts and Figures". In order to achieve a more equitable and just society, understanding the dynamics of gender equality is imperative. This compilation of facts and figures in a historical series with accurate and relevant information serves as a valuable resource for informed decisions for gender responsive planning in Nepal. The publication is a product of Gender Equality for Development (GEfD) in Nepal, an institutional collaboration program with the aim of strengthening government capacity to develop, implement, and monitor policies based on gender equality knowledge.

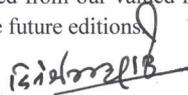
The publication gives valuable input for dialogue to plan and implement programs for gender equality. The data covers dimensions of gender inequality encompassing demography, motherhood and children, education, labour market conditions, traditional practices, women's empowerment, and women safety as major concerns. These topics have been presented in diagrams and figures illustrating causality linkage to policy implications.

GEfD has established collaboration between Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, National Statistics Office and other relevant government agencies and enhanced their ability to compile, analyse, and disseminate gender equality data.

I, on behalf of MoWCSC, appreciate the support from NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation), Bufdir (Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs), Statistics Norway and the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu in realizing this publication. I hope this factual foundation that has been explored and explained in this publication will empower individuals, institutions and policy makers with informed decisions and implement targeted interventions.

Furthermore, the constructive suggestions on this publication are welcomed from our valued readers. Any errors and omissions found on this publication will be addressed in the future editions.

April 2024


Dinesh Bhattarai
Secretary

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Chapter 1

Population

Women outnumber, and outlive men

Women outnumber men in all provinces in Nepal, and men's labor migration is the main cause of this demographic difference. In 2021, about 2.2 million Nepali lived abroad, and over 80 percent were men. Additionally, significant improvements in women's health have resulted in a two-year longer life expectancy than men.

The population of Nepal has been increasing steadily over the last hundred years. In the 1911 census there were 5.6 million people in the country. The population recorded in the 2021 census was 29.2 million. The population increase has not been as steep as in many other developing countries of the world, especially if we look at the last decades. Two key factors influence the population trends. For one, declining fertility and maternal mortality rates coupled with better health outcomes for women have contributed to women's increased life expectancy. Secondly, migration of skilled and unskilled workers to other parts of the world, especially the Gulf states, is a key feature of Nepal's demographic trends.

More women than men in the country

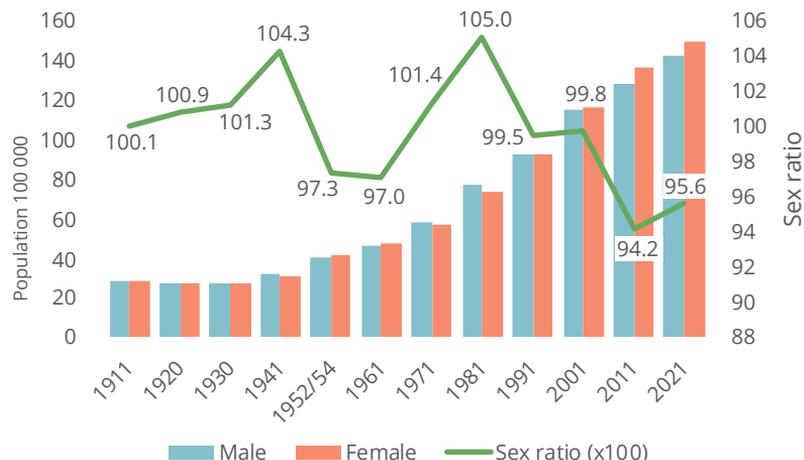
Men are migrating abroad for work at a higher rate than women. This means that there are more women than men in Nepal. In the 2021 census, 51.1 percent of the population were women. The number of men compared to the number of women in the country has fluctuated over the years. Censuses are normally carried out every ten years, and in the last four censuses – starting with the one in 1991 – the population of women has been higher than that of men, and the trend continues. While migration of men is the main factor behind this, better maternal care and better health provisions for women and girls in general are probably also major factors.

This becomes even more likely when we see that the sex ratio in the censuses of 1981, 1971 and 1941 all had a substantial majority of men. The two censuses carried out in the decades after World War II both show a majority of women in the population. This might be due to the death of many Nepali men in the war as part of the British and Indian armies.

A population census is the complete count of the persons in a country enumerated in their usual place of residence on a fixed date.

Sex ratio is defined as the number of males per 100 females in a given population.

Population and sex ratio, 1911-2021

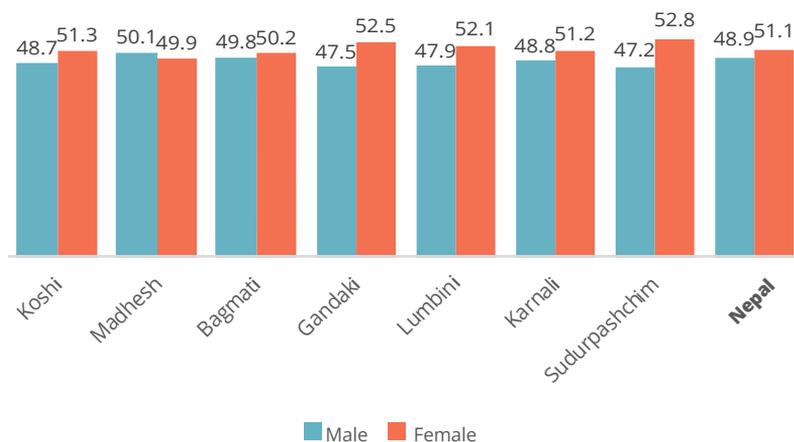


Source: Population Monograph of Nepal 2014 Volume I page 11, and National Report, National Population and Housing Census, National Statistics Office 2023

Differences at province level

When we take a closer look at the share of men and women in the provinces, we find differences between provinces. In Madhesh and Bagmati, the share of women and men is approximately the same. In other provinces like Sudurpashchim and Gandaki, the difference is more than 5 percentage points in favour of women.

Share of male and female in total population (percent), 2021



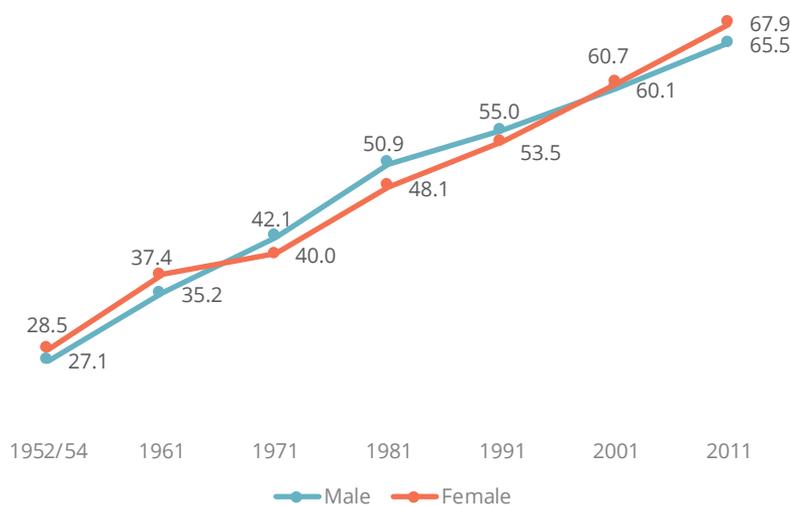
Source: National Population and Housing Census 2021, National Statistics Office (NSO)

Migration of men to other countries is most likely the main factor of these differences. In Sudurpashchim 12.7 percent of the population are absentees, while in Madesh it is only 5 percent. There might be other explanations as well for the different number of men and women on a provincial level. In addition to the migration out of the country, there is also a high level of migration between provinces in Nepal, especially towards Bagmati and the capital, Kathmandu. Other trends in the population, for instance more women moving for education and work, can also contribute to the differences between provinces.

Higher life expectancy for women

In 2011, life expectancy at birth in Nepal was estimated at 66.6 years. This shows a dramatic increase over the years. In the 1952/54 census, the life expectancy was estimated to be only 28 years. This increase in life expectancy is the result of a general improvement in living standards, education and access to healthcare. There is a difference in life expectancy between women and men, at 65.5 years for men and 67.9 years for women, and the increase in life expectancy for women has been even steeper than the general increase. In the censuses from 1971 to 1991, the life expectancy rate was in fact higher for men than for women. The reasons behind this might have been poor maternity care and health facilities in general in Nepal. The same trend was seen in the general sex ratio in the population. From 2001 and up to today, the life expectancy in Nepal is higher for women than for men.

Life expectancy at birth (years), 1952/54 - 2011



Source: Population Monograph of Nepal 2014 Volume I page 190, CBS

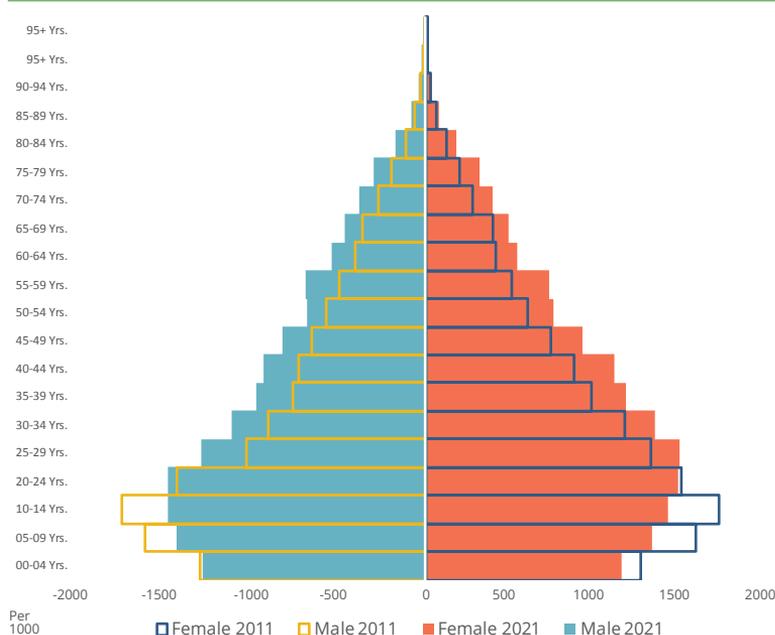
Better maternal health and generally better health services for women and girls are two main factors behind this shift. For instance, the maternal mortality ratio went down from 536 deaths per 10,000 women in 1996 to 151 in 2021.

Women living longer than men is also in line with the general trend in life expectancy in other countries around the world. Women are generally expected to live longer than men, because of factors like heart problems among men, obesity and violent deaths at a younger age.

Increasing elderly population and more women in the elderly population

As the life expectancy rate is rising, this also leads to a higher proportion of elderly and old people in the country. The proportion of senior citizens (i.e. population aged 60 and over) was 10.2 percent in 2021 compared to 4.9 in 1952/54. The population of women was in fact higher than that of men in all age groups above 20 years in 2021. In 2011, by comparison, the population of women was only higher in the groups above 49 years of age. This further indicates the higher emigration among men, especially of the working age population.

Population by sex and age group, 2011 and 2021



Source: National Population and Housing Census 2011/2021, NSO

In 2021, the age group from 0 to 14 (children) constituted 27.8 percent of the total population and 15-24-year-olds (adolescents) made up 19.7 percent. The proportion of children and adolescents was much higher in 2011 at 34.9 and 20 percent, respectively.

Over the past three decades, women have been in the majority. However, when we look at the sex ratio within the first year of a child's life, boys outnumber girls by a significant margin of 114 boys for every 100 girls. To put it in concrete terms, the National Population Census 2021 revealed that there were 219,317 boys under one year old, while there were 191,842 girls in the same age category. This means that there were 27,475 more male infants than female infants.

This gender imbalance is even more pronounced in the disaggregated level, like Dhanusha district, where the sex ratio for infants under one year old is extremely skewed, with 133 boys for every 100 girls. This suggests that the traditional practice of preferring sons over daughters may still be practised in these areas.

Dramatic rise in number of absentees over the last decades

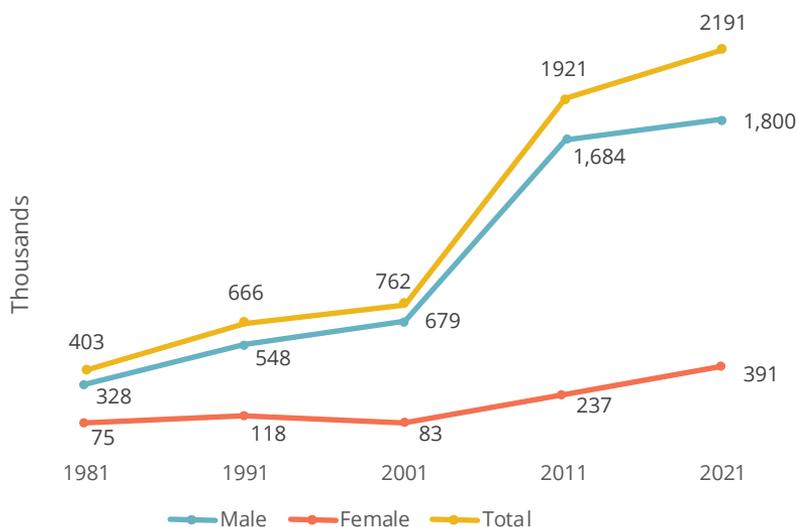
A large share of the population has migrated abroad for different reasons, primarily for work and education. In 2021, 2,190,592 Nepali resided outside of Nepal. The greatest share of the absentee population was male. Women made up 17.8 percent of the absentee population, though this number is now increasing.

More women in the elderly population made up

17.8%

of the absentee population

Absentee population abroad (in 1000), 1981-2021



Source: National Population and Housing Censuses, CBS

The number of absentees has increased sharply over the past decades. In the 2001 census, only 762,000 Nepalis were counted as absentees.

In Lumbini Province, 19.2 percent are absentees. This is the highest share among the provinces, closely followed by Bagmati at 18.2 percent. Karnali has the lowest share of absentee population, at 4.3 percent.

When comparing the absentee population by gender, statistics find that the share of women was the highest in Bagmati Province, almost 29.6 percent, followed by Sudurpashchim, where a quarter of the total absentee population were women. In all other provinces the share of male absentees compared to female was higher than 80 percent.

Migration has a major effect on the demographic, social and economic situation of the country. On the positive side, remittances sent back to Nepal contributes to poverty reduction in Nepal. However, there are also some negative sides of migration. As men migrate at higher rates, many women are left behind with sole responsibility for the family. This may limit their access to jobs or to starting a business. In this sense, the labour migration of men might cement gender roles and leave women behind financially, dependent on remittances.

Female labour migrants are at higher risk of being victimised, for instance through gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, forced labour and human trafficking (Report of forced labour and forced marriage, IOM and ILO, 2022).

Definition of “other gender” in the census

“Other gender” refers to sexual and gender minorities.

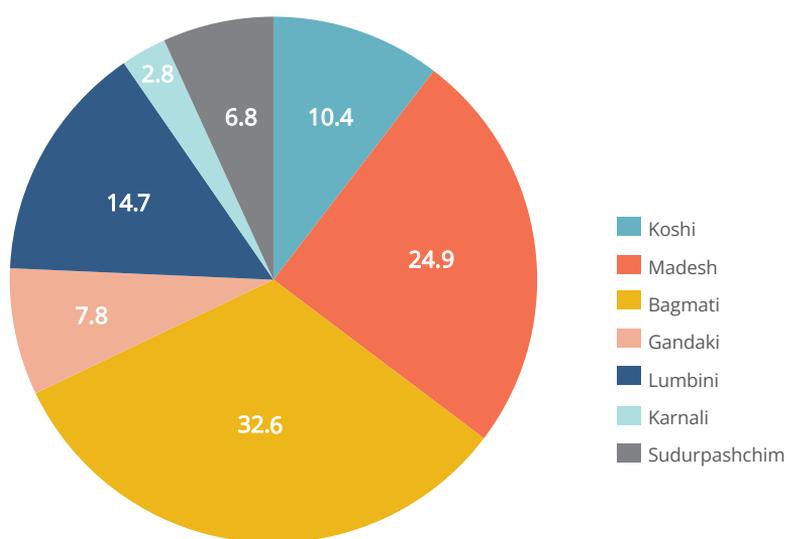
Migration is thereby a key gender issue to address both domestically and in relation to labour migration to recipient countries.

Number of sexual and gender minorities likely underreported

In 2015, Nepal became the world’s 10th country to specifically protect sexual and gender minorities in its constitution. In addition, following a Supreme Court ruling on 28 June 2023, same-sex couples are now able to legally register marriages.¹

Nepal is also one of the few countries in the world to include a question on sexual and gender minorities in its population census and has done so since 2011. In the 2021 census, a total of 2928 people, 0.01 percent of the total population, responded “other” to the question of gender. This number is likely to be lower than the actual sexual and gender minority population. For one thing, persons identifying as men or women can also be gender minorities. Secondly, as a question on sexual orientation is not included, the census results may not contain specific information on the sexual and gender minorities in Nepal. Numbers are also likely underreported because there is still stigma attached to this issue.

Distribution of population of other gender (percent) 2021



Source: National Population and Housing Census 2021, NSO

The distribution of “other gender” per province indicates that the province containing the capital, Kathmandu, has a larger proportion of gender minorities than other provinces. Sexual and gender minorities often gather in larger cities to form communities of support. It is important to reduce stigma and promote inclusion for sexual and gender minorities in the whole country. Due to the absence of dedicated surveys, there is a data gap on sexual and gender minorities, and therefore more research is needed on this.

¹ Human Rights Watch (05.07.2023). Nepal’s Historic Achievement on Marriage Equality.

Chapter 2

Motherhood and Children

Remarkable progress in women's and children's health over last decades

The maternal mortality rate fell from 539 to 151 per 100,000 live births from 1996 to 2021, saving countless mothers' lives. In the same period, child mortality decreased from 38 to 28 per 1000 children. Improved women's health, lower fertility rates, and skilled attendance during childbirth are important factors behind these achievements.

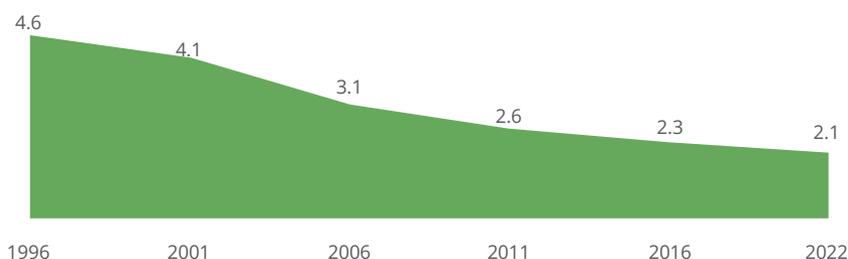
The welfare and health of women is closely connected to how they are treated as mothers – during pregnancy, while giving birth, and in the days after. Children's health is also crucial – not only in terms of reducing child mortality but also to be able to nurture healthy young people and adults.

Over the past decades, maternal mortality has fallen sharply, and the general health of mothers has improved. This has, among other things, led to a higher life expectancy at birth for women. However, there are still many aspects of motherhood and childhood where improvements need to be made for both mothers and children.

A record low of 2 children per woman

Over the past two decades, Nepal has experienced a significant and noteworthy decline in women's fertility. The average number of children expected per woman has decreased markedly, from 4.6 in 1996 to 2.1 in 2022.

Total fertility rate of women aged 15-49 years, 1996-2022



Source: Nepal Demographic and Health Surveys, MoHP

This remarkable trend can be attributed to several factors, most of which have positively influenced women's reproductive choices. Improved access to education and employment opportunities for women, increased utilisation of various contraceptive methods and better access to reproductive healthcare are some of the main reasons behind this positive and encouraging outcome. Other factors such as the large number of absent men might also have contributed to the development to some extent.

A lower fertility rate is predominantly positive for women for the reasons discussed above. However, the fertility rate might also become too low to maintain the population in a country, as is the case in many countries

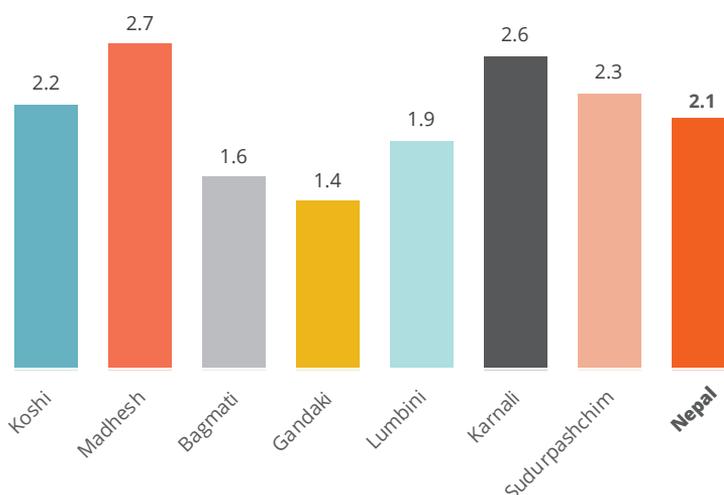
Total fertility rate (TFR) is the average number of children that a woman of reproductive age (15–49 years) will give birth to, assuming that the fertility pattern remains constant and no one dies before the age of 50.

throughout the world. Improved policies for women and mothers like paid parental leave and more childcare, are some ways other countries try to change this trend.

Higher fertility in Madesh

The fertility rate also differs substantially between provinces.. Madhesh and Karnali display the highest figures, while Gandaki and Bagmati record the lowest rates. The variations between the provinces can be attributed to several factors. High fertility rates in some provinces may be a consequence of a higher prevalence of early/child marriages, lower rates of youth literacy, limited access to mass media, and inadequate reproductive healthcare for women. Conversely, the lower fertility rates may be linked to higher education levels, better healthcare and more young males migrating out of the region.

Total fertility rate for women aged 15-49 years, 2022



Source: Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2022, MoHP

Two-child pattern the most common

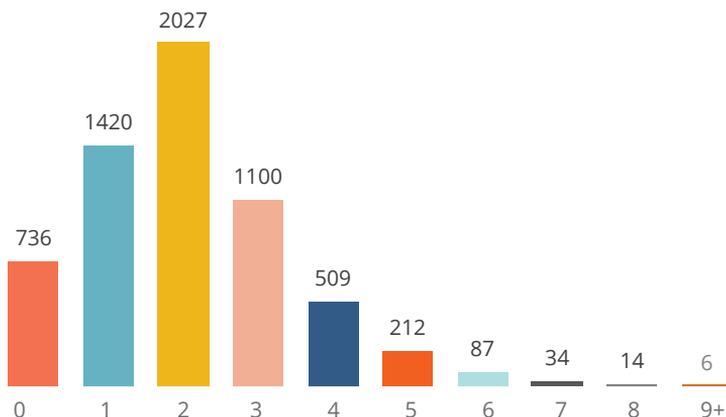
The proportion of women having given birth to 2 children was

31.9%

In the National Population Census of 2021, all married women were asked how many children they had. More than two million married women aged 15-49 years had two children, making this the most common number of children. 1.4 million women had one child, while 1.1 million had three children. 700,000 married women had no children. The proportion of women having given birth to 2 children was almost one third (31.9 percent).

It is much more uncommon to have a larger number of children, and the numbers from the census show that 54,000 married women in Nepal under the age of 50 have given birth to seven or more children.

Ever married women age 15-49 years (1000) by number of children ever born alive, 2021



The age-specific fertility rate per 1000 women aged 15-19 decreased from 71 in 2014 to 63 in 2019.

Source: National Population and Housing Census 2021, NSO

Early childbearing prevails, but has been reduced

Several efforts have been made by the government to decrease early childbearing in Nepal, resulting in a declining trend. The age-specific fertility rate per 1000 women aged 15-19 decreased from 71 in 2014 to 63 in 2019 (NMICS 2014 & 2019). This positive change can be attributed to various factors, including increased health awareness, a growing trend of delayed marriage, improved employment opportunities for women and rapid urbanisation. Additionally, government policies promoting compulsory and free primary education, free secondary education, basic health rights, and health campaigns have also played a significant role in contributing to the decrease in early childbearing rates.

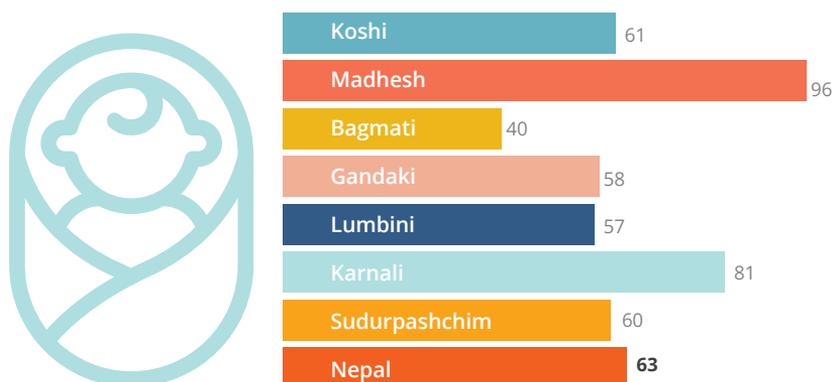
The adolescent birth rate was highest in Madhesh (96 per 1000 women) and lowest in Bagmati (40 per 1000 women). The disparity between the provinces could be attributed to various factors, including differences in education, socioeconomic status, prevalence of poverty, and employment.

It is still important to decrease early childbearing, since it has many negative impacts for the young mothers. These include a higher risk of dropping out of education, different serious health risks for both mother and child, and socioeconomic disadvantages. Education and awareness initiatives/campaigns, informative advertising, on-road presentations, and media programmes have the potential to decrease the incidence of teenage pregnancy.

Early childbearing is defined as giving birth at age 18 or younger.

Adolescent birth rate, is the age-specific fertility rate per 1000 women aged 15-19 years.

Adolescent Birth Rate 2019

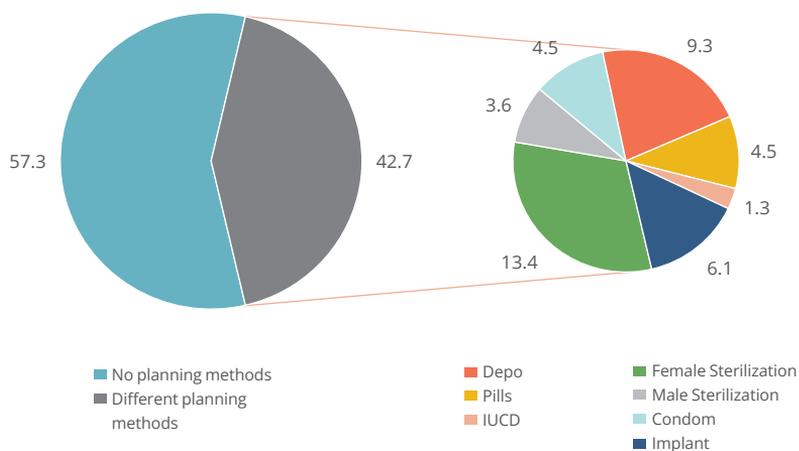


Source: Nepal Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey 2019, CBS

Female-centric family planning methods

Knowledge and use of contraceptives is important for family planning. The government of Nepal is committed to promoting a family planning programme that aims to ensure equitable and rights-based access to voluntary, quality family planning services.

Share of women aged 15-49 years who use different types of family planning methods (percent), 2022



Source: Nepal Demographic and Health Surveys, MoHP

Results from the Nepal Demographic and Health Surveys shows that the knowledge of contraceptive methods among women and men age 15-49 is nearly universal in Nepal.

The overall usage of contraceptives and other family planning methods among women aged 15-49 has gone up from 26 percent in 1996 to 43 percent in

2022. Female sterilisation is the most common mean of family planning among women. This is followed by Depo, male sterilisation, condoms, birth control pills, implants and intra-uterine contraceptive devices (IUCD). The use of implants as a contraceptive method has been on the rise, while male sterilisation and condom use are declining. IUCDs, pills, female sterilisation, and Depo have remained relatively constant in the last five years.

The overall usage of contraceptives and other family planning methods among women aged 15-49 has gone up from 26 percent in 1996 to 43 percent in 2022.

More women receive antenatal care

Antenatal care (ANC) is an indicator of access to and utilisation of healthcare services during pregnancy. As recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO), pregnant women should receive ANC at least four times throughout their pregnancy.

A positive trend has been observed among women in Nepal being treated by or receiving healthcare from skilled health personnel during pregnancy. This may be the result of the implementation of financial incentives for four antenatal care visits under The Safe Motherhood Programme.

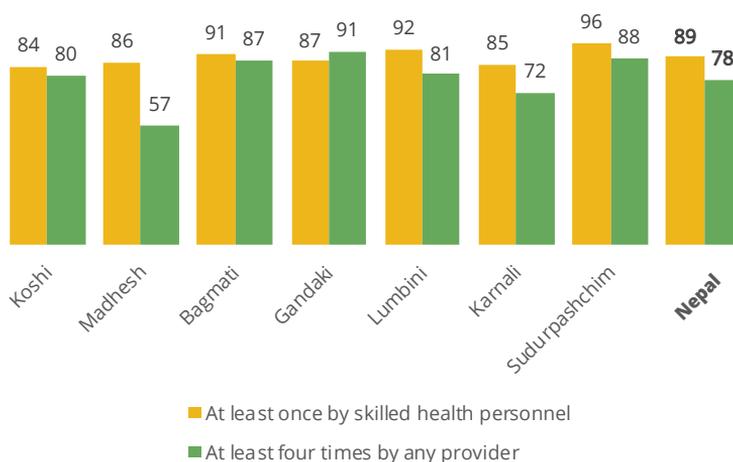
In 2019, almost 90 percent of the women aged 15-49, who had a live birth in the past two years, attended skilled health personnel *at least once*. This is an increase of nearly 21 percentage points compared to 2014. The share of women seeking skilled health personnel at least once is the highest in the Sudurpashchim province (96 percent) and lowest in Koshi (84 percent).

In 2019, the share of women who received *at least four* antenatal care visits from any provider increased to 78 percent, compared to 60 percent in 2014, nationally. The highest percentage was observed in Gandaki province (91 percent) while the lowest was in Madhesh (57 percent). The higher percentage in Gandaki province may be attributed to improved socio-economic factors, such as economic status, education, and employment prospects for mothers.

ANC is crucial for maternal health, to prevent complications and deaths during pregnancy, and to prevent or identify and treat conditions that may threaten the health of the foetus and newborn.

Antenatal care (ANC) coverage is the percentage of women with a live birth who, during the pregnancy, were attended (a) at least once by skilled health personnel (b) at least four times by any provider.

Women age 15-49 years who were attended by skilled health personnel (percent), 2019



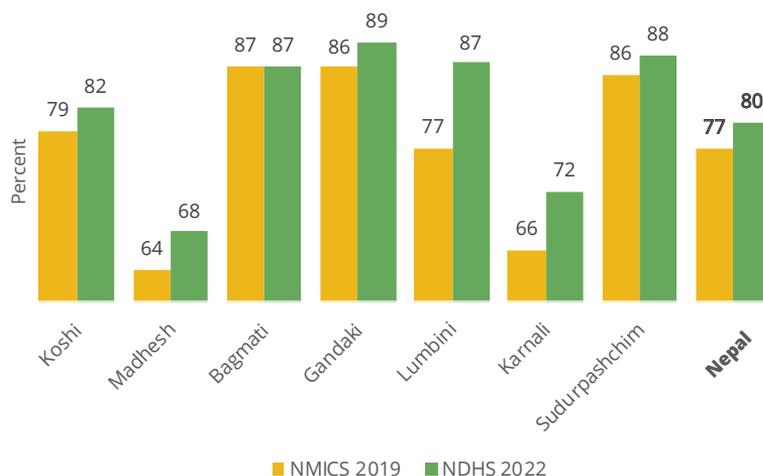
Source: Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, CBS

Skilled attendant at delivery is the percentage of women with a live birth of newborn was attended by skilled health personnel. It includes availability of skilled attendants, necessary supplies and equipment, as well as provision of referral mechanisms to ensure that women can access more comprehensive facilities when required.

More children are delivered with help from skilled health personnel

In 2022, 80 percent of women aged 15-49 who had given live birth in the last two years received care from skilled health personnel, compared to 77 percent in 2019. Increases in living standards, education level, access to and frequency of antenatal care visits have resulted in a higher proportion of skilled attendants being present during childbirth. The number of deliveries with a skilled attendant was the highest in Bagmati Province, at 87 percent of births, and the lowest in Madhesh (64 percent).

Women aged 15-49 with a live birth in the last 2 years, whose most recent live birth was attended by skilled health personnel (percent). 2019 and 2022



Source: NMICS 2019, CBS & NDHS 2022, MoHP

Skilled attendance at delivery reduces maternal and newborn mortality, which is one of the key gender indicators monitored within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Increasing the proportion of skilled attendance at delivery is advocated by national and international agencies as a crucial measure in reducing maternal and perinatal mortality and morbidity.

Drastic improvement in maternal mortality ratio

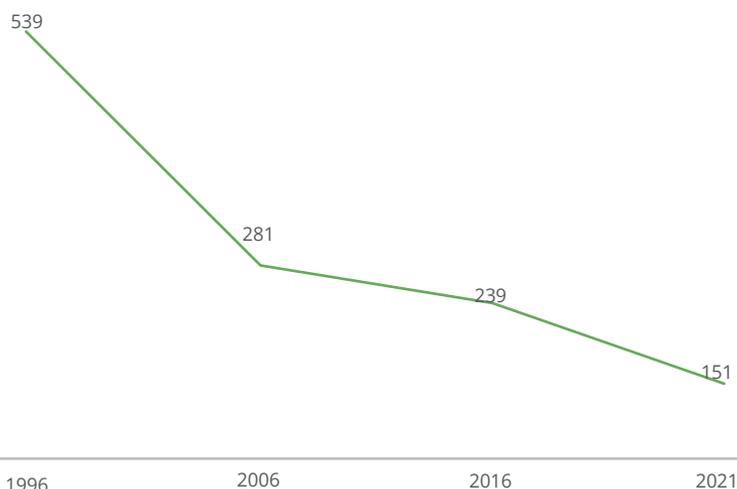
The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births due to causes related to pregnancy or childbirth. This ratio is used as a criterion for the quality of medical care in a country.

In previous decades, Nepal had one of the highest maternal mortality ratios (MMR) in the world, with many women dying during pregnancy or childbirth due to insufficient access to quality healthcare services.

Since 1996, when the ratio was at 539 deaths per 100,000 live births, there has been a sharp decline in the MMR. In the years following there have been steady improvements in the healthcare of birthing women, leading to an MMR of 151 in the latest census from 2021.

There is some variation between the provinces when it comes to the MMR.. The highest MMR can be found in Lumbini (207), while the lowest is in Bagmati (98). Bagmati is the province with the capital Kathmandu, which also has the best healthcare and hospitals in the country.

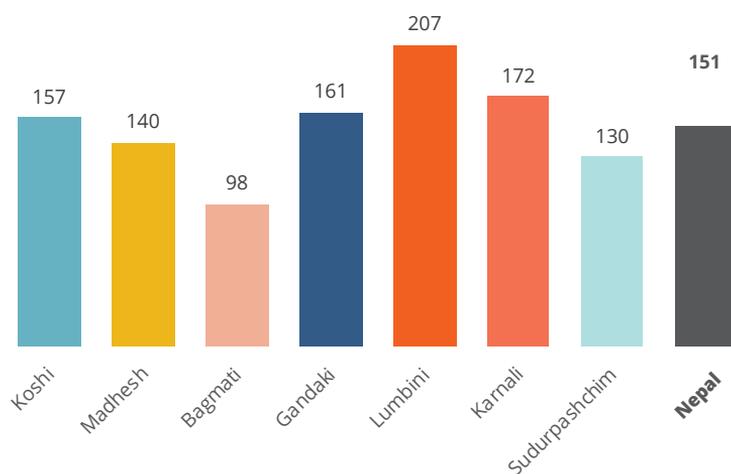
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births), 1996-2021



Source: Nepal Demographic and Health Surveys & Nepal Maternal Mortality Study 2021, MoHP

The Nepali government has made a dedicated commitment to keep reducing the maternal mortality ratio to below 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by the year 2030. To reach this target, it needs to reduce its MMR by at least 10 percent annually, by addressing significant disparities in maternal health access, utilisation, and quality across geographic regions.

Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births), 2021



Source: Nepal Maternal Mortality Study 2021, MoHP

Neonatal mortality refers to the probability of dying within the first 28 days of life, expressed as the number of deaths per 1,000 live births.

Infant mortality refers to the probability of dying between birth and the first birthday, expressed as the number of deaths per 1,000 live births.

Post-neonatal mortality refers to the death of an infant that occurs after the first 28 days of life but before the first birthday, expressed as the difference between infant and neonatal mortality rates.

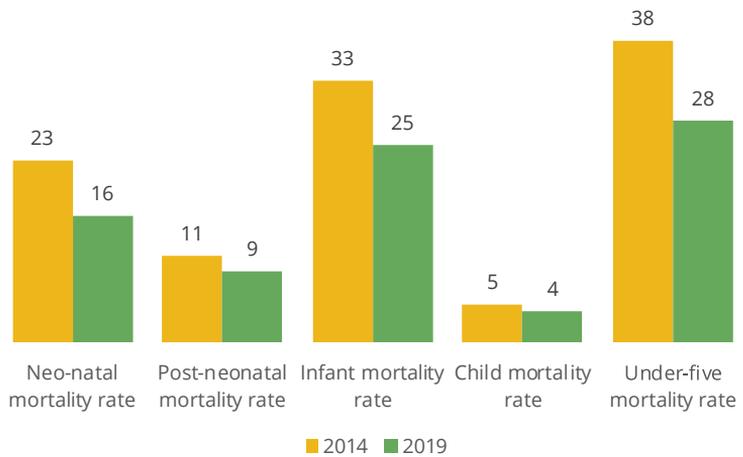
Child mortality refers to the probability of dying between the first and the fifth birthdays, expressed as number of deaths per 1000 live births.

Under-five mortality refers to the probability of dying between birth and the fifth birthday, expressed as the number of deaths per 1,000 live births.

Improvement in early childhood mortality rates

Reduction in child mortality continues to be one of the most important objectives in national plans and programmes. In Nepal, the early childhood mortality rate has declined over a five-year period, from 2014 to 2019.

Early childhood mortality rate (per 1000), 2014 and 2019



Source: Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 & 2019, CBS

The under-five mortality rate – has gone down from 38 deaths per 1000 children in 2014 to 28 per 1000 in 2019.

Better skilled birth attendance and implementation of Community-Based Maternal, Newborn and Child Health programmes have likely contributed to a significant reduction in the total child mortality rate. Furthermore, results from the NMICS 2019 have shown that mortality rates tend to decrease with the increase in mothers' education. Additionally, lower and middle-income families experience higher rates of early childhood mortality rate compared to those with higher income. (NMICS)

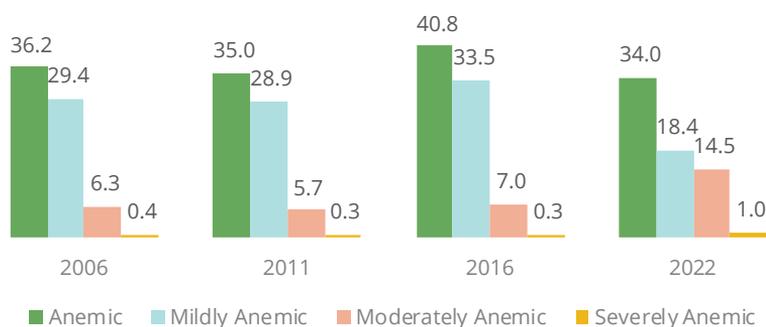
Despite the encouraging developments, further efforts to substantially lower child mortality are still necessary.

Anaemia is a serious concern for women of reproductive age

Anaemia is a major concern for pregnant women, as it can lead to increase maternal mortality rates and adverse birth outcomes. Despite the implementation of national nutrition programmes and policies, including the distribution of iron/folic acid supplements, the incidence of anaemia among women of reproductive age has been no significant reduction. Data from the National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) over a sixteen-year period shows a rise in moderate and severe anaemia, while overall anaemia rates have remained relatively stable.

Anaemia is a condition of having insufficient blood in the human body mostly caused by iron deficiencies.

Prevalence of anaemia in women aged 15-49 (percent), 2006-2022



Source: Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2006-2022, MoHP

Chapter 3

Education

Rising literacy leads way to gender equality in education

Nepal's literacy rate has increased for both women and men over the last decades, yet a 15 percentage points gender gap remains in disfavour of women. To eradicate the gender gap in literacy the government has mandated compulsory education and targeted measures. Nepal has achieved gender parity in enrolment in primary and secondary education, complete with near equal youth literacy rates. The commitment to educational equity is also reflected in the increase of women in higher education.

Education is one of the most crucial tools in reducing inequality. Access to education is essential in knowledge-based decision making as well as important for being able to break free from poverty. Education can lead to economic benefits, by granting access to work and income, and empowers individuals to live healthy lives. Although literacy rates have improved dramatically during the last decade for women as well as men, there is still a gender gap. Nepal has made significant progress in net enrolment in primary and secondary level education for girls during the last decade, and achieved its goal for gender parity between the sexes already in 2013. Access to education is also a sustainable development goal that aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable, quality education at all levels.

Women's literacy rate on the rise, but still a major gap

In 2021, 76 percent of the Nepali population aged 5 years and above were literate. There has been a huge rise in the number of people who can both read and write during the last decade. At the beginning of the 1950s, only 5 percent of the population (10 % of men and 1 % of women) were literate².

The increase in literacy has been dramatic for both women and men. In the census in 1952/54, only one in a hundred women and one in ten men were literate. From 1975, the government made free and compulsory primary education a citizen right. There was a significant increase in literacy rates for both women and men in Nepal from 1971 onwards. In 2021, 84 percent of men and 69 percent of women were literate. Even though the rise in literacy has been higher for women than for men in the same period, there is still a substantial gap. According to The World Bank, the gap between adult men and women is 17.7 percentage points, which is higher than the South Asia average gap of 15.7 percent. The government of Nepal's goal is to reach 99% youth literacy by 2023/24 for both men and women (15th Periodic Plan).

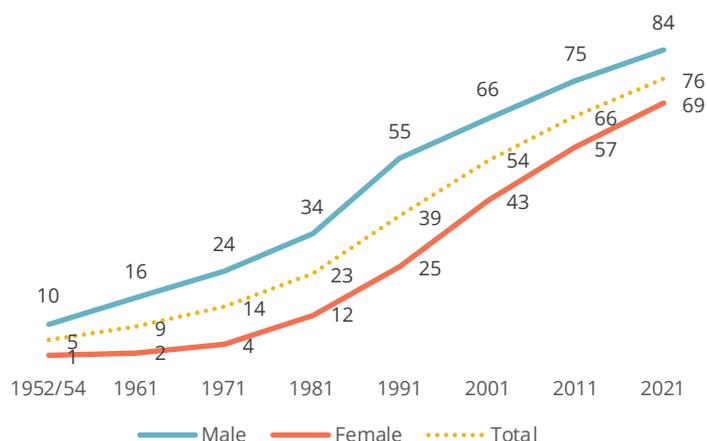
The literacy rates are increasing and the gender gap in literacy is closing. In 2019 the national average of literacy rates for youths aged 15-24 years was 88 percent for women and 93 percent for men (NMICS 2019). The goal of 99% youth literacy thereby looks to be within reach over time.

To increase the literacy rate, several educational policies have been implemented by the government of Nepal. The most important initiative during the last decade was the National Education System Plan 1971-1976, which consolidated the education system. The plan introduced a new curriculum and teaching materials, focussing on teacher training and making educational materials available at no cost for remote areas and at fair rates to other

A person who can both read and write in any language is defined as a literate.

areas. Furthermore, primary education was made free and compulsory, and secondary education was also made free.

Literacy rate of aged 5 years and above (percent), 1952-2021



Source: Population Censuses of Nepal, 1952-2021²

In the early 2000s, Education for All (2004-2009) was introduced. One of its main objectives was to improve equity in access to education, especially for girls and students from disadvantaged communities. Other initiatives have also been introduced to improve gender disparity in education, such as free mid-day meals from 2015 (Food for Life Nepal), and free sanitary pads for girls in community schools from 2021.

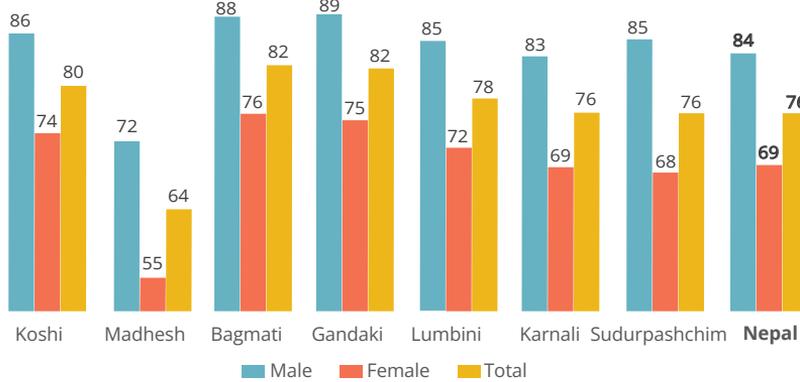
Higher literacy gender gaps in some provinces

The gender gap in literacy rates persists in all provinces but is highest in Madhesh Province. In 2021, only about half of the female population (55 percent) in Madhesh were literate. It should be noted that the literacy rate for men in Madhesh is also the lowest reported rate of all provinces (72 percent).

Furthermore, findings from 2019 show that the gender gap in youth literacy rates between provinces is almost eliminated, except for Madhesh (NMICS 2019). As part of an awareness campaign, the government of Madhesh launched an education and insurance scheme in 2022 (Daughter education insurance/ fixed term savings programme) to counteract gender gaps in education and early marriage.

² Questions on literacy in the National Population Census of Nepal were asked to all persons aged 6 years and above until 2011. From 2011 and onwards it was asked to all persons aged 5 years and above.

Literacy rate of population aged 5 years and above (percent), 2021



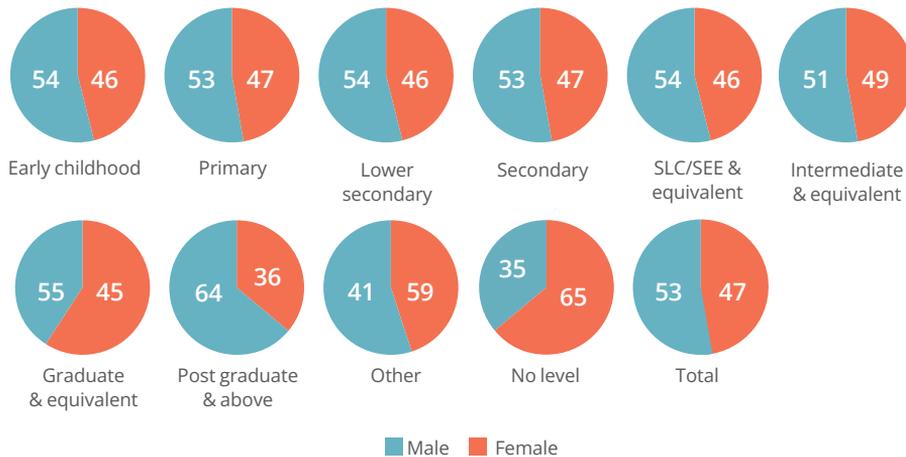
Source: National Population and Housing Census, 2021

More women than men lack formal education in Nepal

The male population of Nepal has higher educational attainment than women. Almost 360,000 people report having no level of education, and women make up more than two thirds of this group. On the other end of the scale, the share of men is especially high in the group with education at post-graduate level and above.

Educational attainment:
The highest level of education attained in the population.

Population aged 5 years and above by educational attainment (level completed), 2021



Source: National Population and Housing Census 2021, NSO

These levels should be seen in context of the development in literacy rates and enrolment in higher education in Nepal. Although women in Nepal in total have lower educational attainment than men, the literacy rates have been increasing over the second half of the last decade. Younger generations mark a shift, with higher literacy rates for both genders and an increase in women's enrolment in higher education.

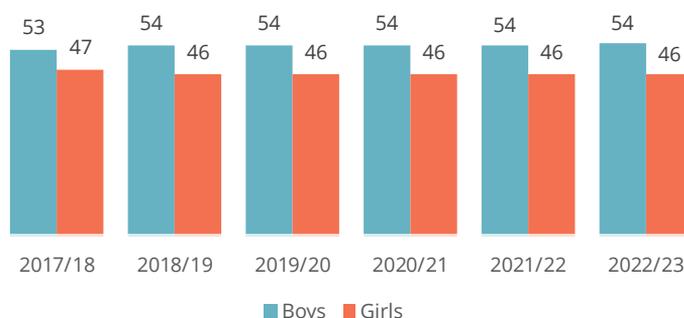
Almost 360,000 people report having no level of education, and women make up more than **2/3** of this group.

Gender gap in early childhood education programmes is closing

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2 aims to ensure access to early childhood development, care and pre-primary education for all girls and boys. Such access, like kindergartens and pre-schools, stimulates young children's learning abilities and emotional and social development, thus preparing them for primary education. Nepal has defined one year of pre-primary education as compulsory by law and incorporated it as part of Nepal's free and compulsory basic education in the 8th Amendment to the Education Act from 2016.

In 2022/23, 46 percent of the children enrolled in early childhood development (ECD) and pre-primary class (PPC) were girls, and this has been stable over the last years.

Share of enrolment in ECD and PPE, by sex. 2017/18-2022/23



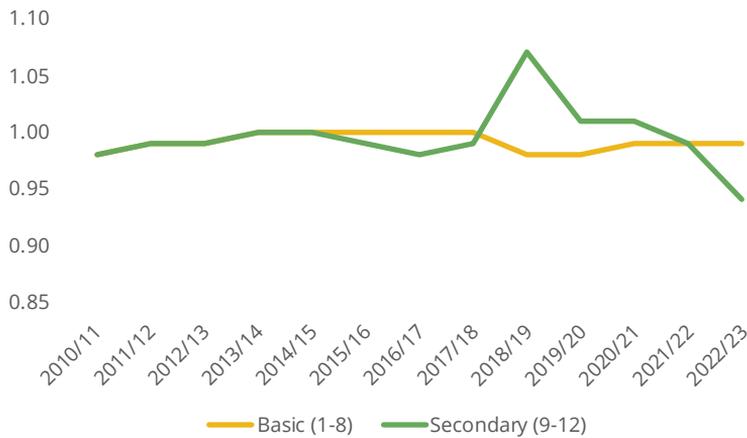
Source: Flash Report 2022/23, CEHRD (to be put under the graph)

Nepal has achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary education

During the last decade, Nepal has made significant progress in net enrolment for basic education. The government of Nepal had set a goal of reaching a net enrolment rate of 99 percent for basic level and 65 percent for secondary level by 2023/24.

Already in 2013, Nepal achieved its goal for gender parity between the sexes. This came as a result of several initiatives by the government to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education and achieving gender equality in education. The focus has been on ensuring girls' full and equal access to quality basic education.

Gender parity index in net enrollment rate, 2010/11-2022/23

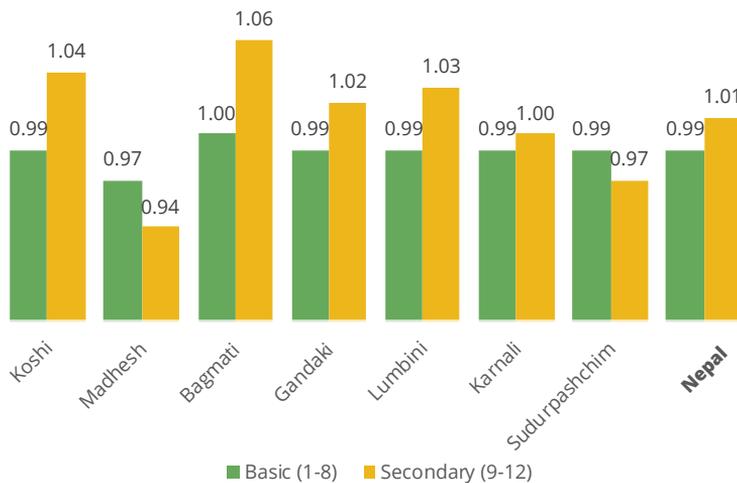


Source: Flash Report 2022/23, CEHRD

Community schools (equivalent to public schools) obtain approval or permission and receive regular grants from the government

Institutional schools (equivalent to private schools) obtain approval or permission for operation on the condition that they do not receive regular grants from the government.

Gender parity index in net enrollment rate by province, 2021/22



Source: Flash Report 2021/22, CEHRD

For primary education, Nepal has achieved gender parity in all provinces. Gender equality is also achieved at secondary level; however, there are three provinces where there appears to be slight disparity in favour of one of the genders. In Koshi and Bagmati, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) is 1.04 and 1.06 respectively, indicating a slight favour towards girls. Whilst the GPI of Madhesh is 0.94, indicating a slight disparity in favour of boys.

High completion for both girls and boys

Promotion rate is the percentage of students promoted to the next grade in the following school year.

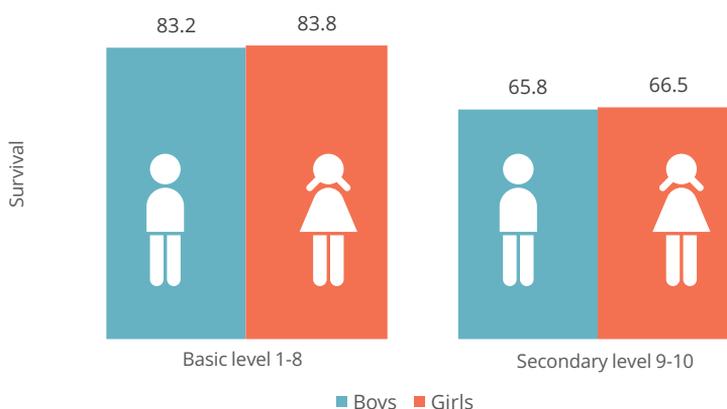
Repetition rate is the proportion of students enrolled in a given grade and in a given school year who study in the same grade the following school year.

Dropout rate is the percentage of students enrolled in a given grade or cycle or level of education in a given school year that are no longer enrolled in the following school year.

Survival rate is the percentage of students enrolled in the first grade of a given level of education who reach the final grade of that level.

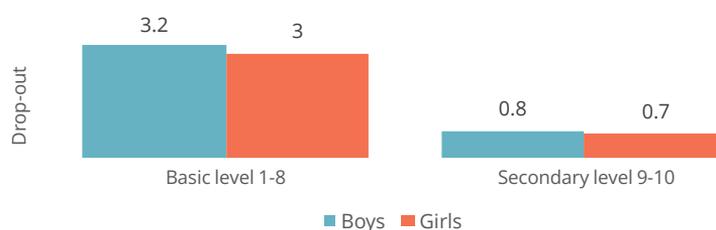
In 2021, there was no significant gender disparity in promotion, repetition, drop-out and survival rate at either basic or secondary level. In 2000, 57 percent of girls and 54 percent boys had completed basic education level. This increased to 83 percent in basic education and 66 percent in secondary education of girls and boys in 2020/21. Thus, the survival rate increased and the gender gap closed in the period leading up to 2020/21. The gender difference in repetition rates was also small, only about 5 percent in basic level and almost 3 percent in secondary level for both girls and boys respectively. In 2020/21 the drop-out rate for boys was slightly higher than for girls in primary and secondary level.

Enrolment efficiency (survival rates), 2020/21



Source: Flash Report I of EMIS 2021/22, CEHRD

Enrolment efficiency (drop-out rates), 2020/21

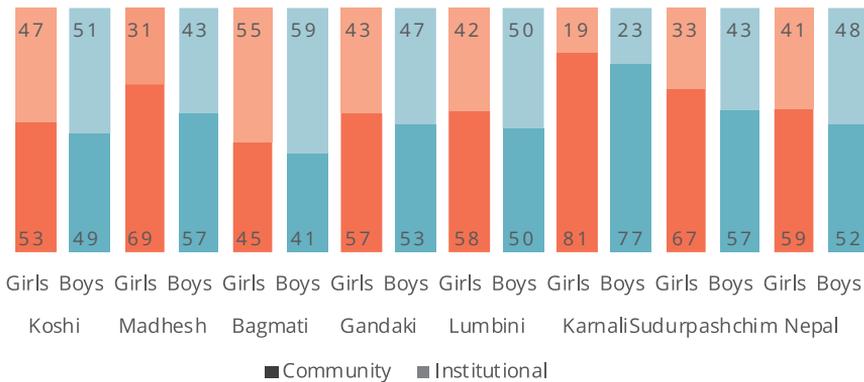


Source: Flash Report I of EMIS 2021/22, CEHRD

More investment in boys' education in all provinces

There has been great improvement in the literacy rate, school enrolment and survival rate for both boys and girls in Nepal, and the gender gap in education is closing. However, the enrolment rates in the public community schools and private institutional schools suggest that there is a preference for investing in higher education for boys compared to that of girls.

Share of enrolment in community and institutional, by sex and province. 2021/22



Source: Flash Report I of EMIS 2022/23, Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD)

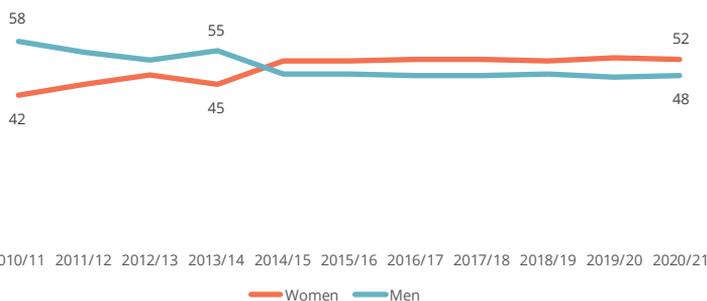
Almost two-thirds of children in Nepal are enrolled in community schools. Of the children enrolled in institutional schools, however, in relative terms there are more boys than girls enrolled in all provinces. The higher costs of institutional schools might play a role in this unequal access of girls to institutional schools. As a consequence, the lower share of girls in institutional schools may result in lower quality of education for girls and fewer co-curricular activities, and in the end, less opportunity to gain formal employment.

Karnali Province has the highest percentage of pupils in community schools, and Bagmati the lowest. In all provinces, except for Bagmati, there are more students of both genders enrolled in community schools compared to institutional schools.

More women than men are enrolled in higher education in Nepal

Out of all students enrolled in higher education in Nepal in 2020/21, women take a lead over men with a share of 53 percent. The enrolment rate for women has been higher than for men since the school year 2014/15. The lower share of men in higher education may be due to factors such as international labour and study migration. The rise in girls' enrolment in higher education increases the number of skilled women, enabling more employment opportunity for them within the country.

Students enrollment in higher education



Source: Annual report 2020/21, University Grants Commission

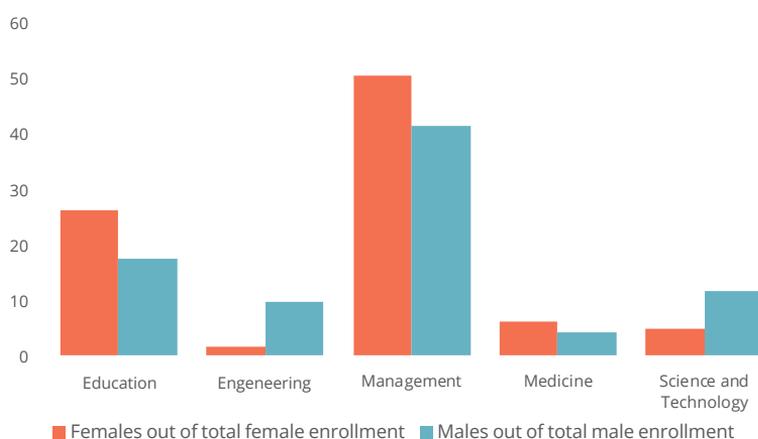
A greater share of men than women choose technical subjects in higher education

Out of all students enrolled in higher education in Nepal in 2020/21, women take a lead over men with a share of

53%.

Men and women still have different preferences in education. When comparing the distribution of female and male students within different faculties, we find that education and management are the most popular choices for both genders. Half of the enrolled female students and 41 percent of male students are enrolled in a management faculty, and one in four of the women and 17 percent of male students are enrolled in education. The biggest gender differences are found in technical faculties such as science, technology and engineering. In engineering, almost ten percent of the total share of male students are enrolled, compared only two percent of female students. The corresponding numbers for science and technology are 12 percent for men and 5 percent for women.

Share of women and men in selected faculties, out of total number of enrolled men and women in higher education, 2020/21



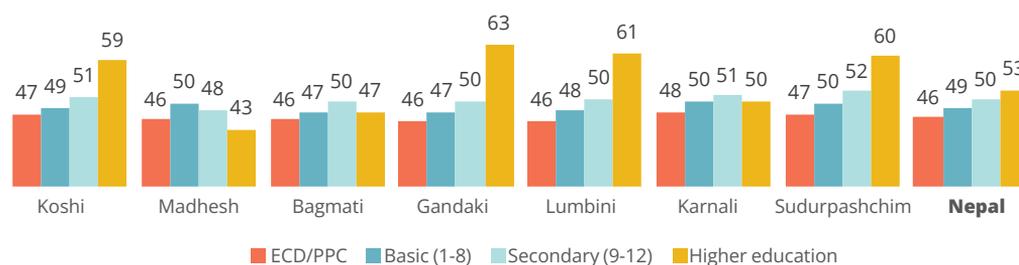
The biggest gender differences are found in technical faculties such as science, technology and engineering.

Source: Annual report 2020/21, University Grants Commission

Very high share of women in high education in some provinces

When comparing female enrolment in different educational levels between provinces, we find that for higher education, there is a very high share of women in some provinces. The highest share is found in Gandaki Province, where more than three out of five (63 percent) enrolled students are female, closely followed by Koshi, Lumbini and Sudurpashchim. Madesh and Bagmati are the only provinces where there are more men than women in higher education. Furthermore, for secondary-level education, the share of girls is higher than boys in all provinces except for Madesh. For the first-level education – childhood development (ECD) and pre-primary class (PPC) groups – there is a higher share of boys enrolled.

Share of girls in enrollment by school type, 2020/21



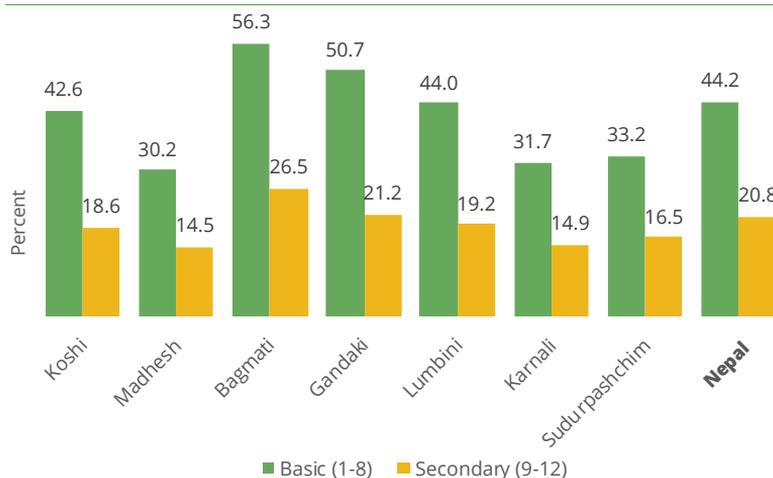
Source: Flash Report I of EMIS 2021/22, CEHRD and Annual Report 2020/21 University Grant Commission

Social barriers are still limiting women's access to education

Research suggests that female teachers have benefits for female students. Therefore, the Nepali government has made efforts to increase the number of female teachers, expecting an increase in enrolment of girls in schools, reducing their drop-out rates and resulting in better academic performance.

To increase the number of female teachers, girls in remote areas who have passed Grade Eight and SLC are given a stipend and residential teachers' training so that they could work as teachers in their local areas. Furthermore, the Education Act (2028) and Education Regulations (2049) made it mandatory to recruit at least one female teacher in each primary school.

Percentage of female teachers in school (percent), 2020/21



Source: Flash Report I 2020/21, CEHRD

Findings show that there is still a lower share of female schoolteachers in Nepal, compared to male. This gender gap is more visible at secondary level, where 21 percent of teachers are female, versus 44 percent in basic level. Madhesh and Karnali have a lower proportion of female teachers at both basic and secondary level, whereas Bagmati and Gandaki have a higher proportion compared to other provinces.

Chapter 4

Labour Market

The gender-segregated labour market

In Nepal, women are considerably less involved in economic activities than men. More than twice as many men are employed than women. Nepal's labour market is also highly segregated, both across sectors and in occupational groups, with a greater share of women than men in the informal sector, especially in agriculture. Consequently, women are overrepresented in the lowest earnings brackets and the pay gap is significant, with women's earnings at two-thirds of men's.

One in four women in active labour force

Nepal's economy is to a large degree an agrarian economy characterised by small-scale subsistence farming. In 2017, approximately 11.4 million people were involved in production or processing of subsistence food. This amounts to 55 percent of those aged 15 years and above. Over the last two decades there has been a gradual change in employment from subsistence farming to the industry and service sectors. However, the transition has been driven mostly by men entering jobs in for example construction, manufacturing, commerce and transport⁵. Women have been disproportionately more involved in production of goods for own final use, such as preparing food, fetching water and collecting firewood. compared to men (NLFS 2017/18).

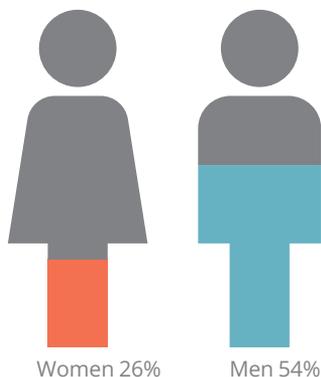
The **labour force participation rate** is a measure of the proportion of the working-age population (15 years and above) that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work. The labour force is the sum of the number of persons employed and unemployed.

The **unemployment rate** measures the proportion of the labour force that is trying to find work. An unemployed person needs to fulfil three criteria: (i) to not have worked at all in the reference week, (ii) to be available to take up work within the next two weeks and (iii) to have been either actively seeking work in the past four weeks or have already found a job that starts in the next three months.

The labour force participation rate is 26 percent for women, compared to almost 54 percent among men.

There is a huge disparity in labour force participation between women and men in Nepal. The labour force participation rate is 26 percent for women, compared to almost 54 percent among men. However, the definition of “labour force” does not include the work of production of goods for own final use, where women are disproportionately more involved.

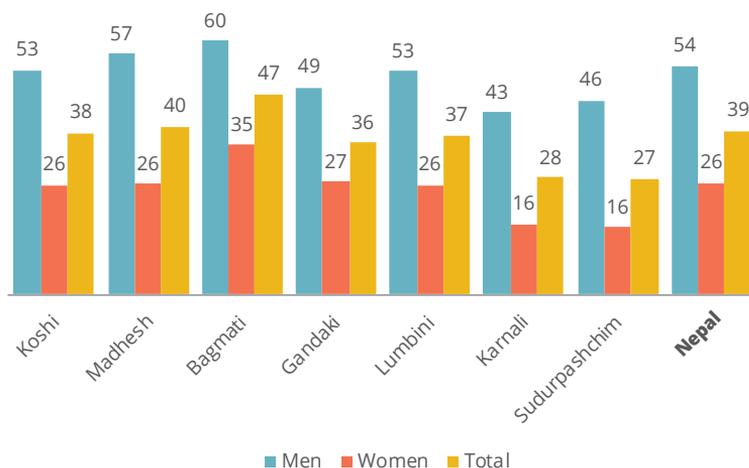
Labour force participation rate (percent), 2017/18



Source: Nepal Labour Force Survey 2017/18, NSO

The biggest gender difference in labour force participation is observed in Sudurpashchim Province. Here, almost half of the male labour force are employed or actively seeking employment, compared with only one in six women. Bagmati has the highest share of women and men active in the workforce, with a participation rate of 36 percent for women and 60 percent for men. The gender gap is observed to be the narrowest (22 percentage points) in Gandaki Province, with a labour force participation rate for women slightly higher than the national rate.

Labour force participation rate (percent), 2017/18

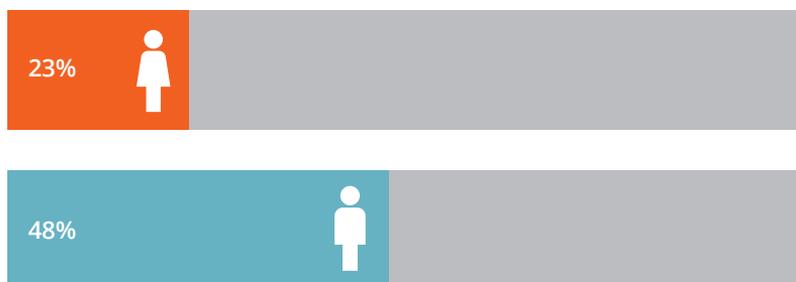


Source: Nepal Labour Force Survey 2017/18, CBS

More than twice as many men as women are employed

Another key labour market indicator is the employment-to-population ratio. This indicator shows the number of people employed against the total working age population. In line with the other labour market indicators, considerably fewer women are employed than men.

Employment-to-population ratio. Percent. 2017/18



Source: Nepal Labour Force Survey, 2017/18, CBS.

Nepal Labour Force Survey 2017/18 reveals that almost half of men of working age (15+ years) are employed (48.3 percent). This is more than double than that of women. Only 22.9 percent of working-age women are in some form of employment.

The low employment rates of Nepali women are mainly due to their engagement in household chores and family care responsibilities, restricting women from being engaged in full-time work or moving for better work opportunities. According to the NLFS III, nine of ten women participated in unpaid family work, compared to four of ten men.

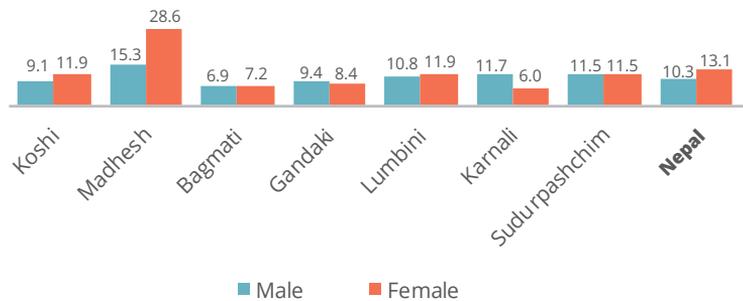
Only
22.9%
of working-age women
are in some form of
employment

Unemployment rates are higher for women

Although the labour force participation rate of men is significantly higher than that of women, no major gender difference is observed in unemployment rates. To be considered unemployed, three criteria must be met simultaneously: the person must be completely without work, currently available to work, and taking active steps to find work.

The unemployment rate of women (13.1 percent) is slightly higher than that of men (10.3 percent).

Unemployment rate by province (percent), 2017/18



Source: Nepal Labour Force Survey 2017/18, CBS

Children in employment: working children who, during a short reference period, were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit.

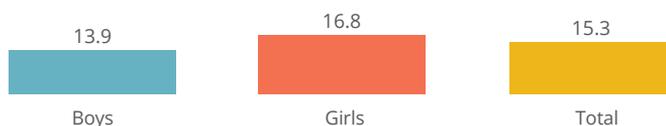
Gender gaps in unemployment rates can be observed among all provinces, except for Karnali and Gandaki. Madhesh has the highest rates of unemployment for both men and women (15.3 percent versus 28.6 percent) as well as the largest gender gap in unemployment. It is also interesting to note that the unemployment rate is equal for women and men in Sudurpashchim, a province where male seasonal migration is high. In Karnali, we find the largest gap in favour of women. Here only 6 percent of women are unemployed, compared to 11.7 percent of men.

Girls more likely to be engaged in child labour than boys

Child labour includes all persons aged 5 to 17 years who are engaged in one or more of the following activities during a specified time period (7 days prior to the survey): Children aged 5-13 years working for at least 1 hour during the reference week; Children aged 14-17 years working for at least 36 hours during the reference week; Children involved in hazardous work, according to the hazardous work list; and Children working during the night.

Even if children should be at school, child labour is still an important source of income for many families in Nepal, especially the poorest. Around 15 percent of all children in Nepal are engaged in labour, and girls are more likely to work (17 percent) than boys (14 percent).

Employment for those aged 5-17 years (percent), 2017/18



Source: Nepal Labour force survey 2017/18, CBS

Furthermore, female-headed households have more children engaged in child labour, compared to male-headed households. According to the Nepal Child Labour Report 2021, child labour occurs in 16.4 percent of female-headed households, compared to 14.7 percent in male-headed households. The data also shows that children are more likely to be involved in labour when none of the adults in the household are employed, confirming that child labour is primarily a necessity for the poorest families.

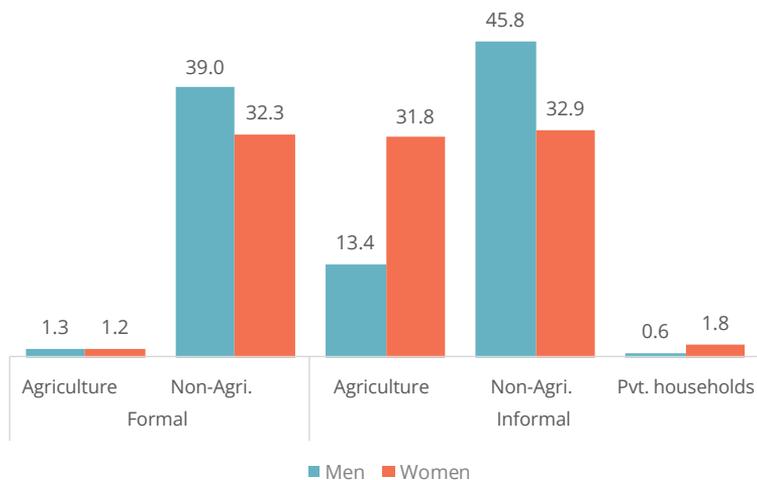
A greater share of women work in informal sector

In the formal sector, nearly all employed persons work in the non-agricultural sector. Four of ten employed men and just above one-third of employed women work in the formal employment sector in Nepal.

Three out of five employed in the informal sector are men, and the majority (45.8 percent) are employed in non-agricultural jobs. Only 13.4 percent work in agriculture. For employed women, the share of women in informal sector is larger (two-thirds), and, as opposed to men, they are close to equally employed in agriculture and non-agriculture jobs (31.8 and 32.9 percent, respectively). Although few are employed in private households, the share of women is three times as big as for men (1.8 and 0.6 percent respectively).

Formal sector comprises those employed in government or state-owned enterprises or international organisations/foreign embassies and those working for incorporated companies or establishments that are registered with relevant authorities.

Currently employed population aged 15 years & above (percent), 2017/18



Informal sector (non-agriculture), on the other hand, comprises those employed in enterprises that are neither incorporated nor registered with authorities. Those employed in private households are regarded as in the informal sector.

Source: Nepal Labour Force Survey, 2017/18, NSO

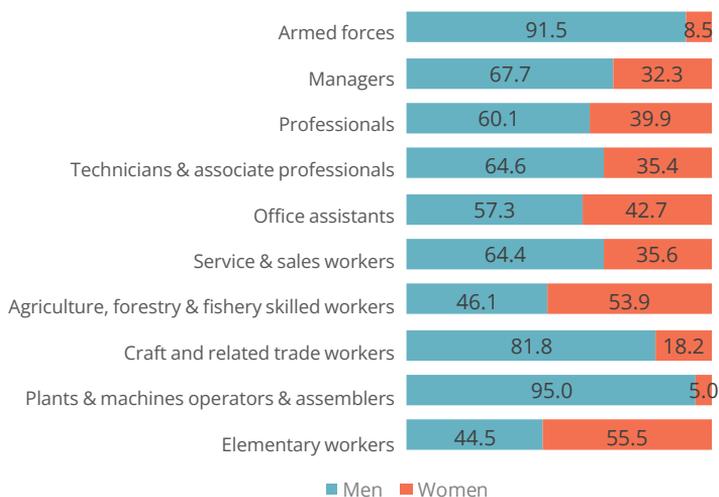
Average monthly earnings for agricultural sector are lower than non-agricultural sector, irrespective of whether it is formal or informal. Most of the employed women are in the agriculture sector.

Working in informal employment is associated with higher risk of exploitation and deprivation of fundamental rights in the work place, as the government is not in a position to regulate it (ILO).

Women's earnings are only 67 percent of men's

Men are overrepresented in high income economic professions, such as managers or professionals, including technicians, according to statistics from the National Population and Housing Census 2021. Women are concentrated in elementary occupation and jobs related to agriculture, forestry and fishery.

Share of men and women 10 years and above by occupation (percent), 2021

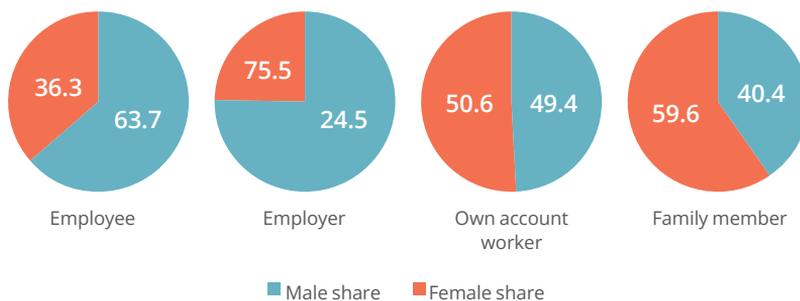


Source: National Population and Housing Census 2021, NSO

Findings from the NLFS III reveals that 42.6 percent of female employees are in low-paid jobs. Monthly median earnings in general are higher for men than women, with women earning 67 percent of what employed men earned.

There is also a gender pay gap when they are in similar occupations. The trend here goes towards more equality. For technician and associate professionals, and skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery occupations, however, the pay gap is slim.

Population 10 years of age and above who performed any economic activity by employment status of major economic activity, 2021



Source: National Population and Housing Census 2021, NSO

When comparing employment status of the economic activity of men and women in Nepal, we find that among the total number of people working as an unpaid *family member* in family business, women are overrepresented at almost 60 percent of the total. Secondly, women make up just over half of *own account workers* in Nepal, whereas only 24 percent of employers and 36 percent of employees are women.

Almost six in ten with monthly earnings less than 7600 Rupees are women

Monthly cash income is the amount that is paid by employer plus any additional money that is earned from tips, commissions or bonus. If a person is involved in more than one job, then the job at which the person works the most hours is considered as the main job.

Share of monthly earnings from employment in main job by sex, 2017/18



Source: Nepal Labour force survey 2017/18, CBS

Women accounted for 58 percent of those who earned less than Rs.7,600 per month – the lowest monthly earning bracket in the statistics. Men accounted for a larger share of the population earning Rs. 7,600 or higher and accounted for almost 88 percent of those earning Rs. 25,000 or more (the highest earnings bracket). The lower earnings for women were mainly due to their engagement in informal sector jobs, lower literacy rate, lack of experience and very low recruitment of women in leading and managerial positions. In 2017, the average monthly earnings in Nepal was 17,809 Rupees.

Women accounted for **58%** of those who earned less than Rs.7,600 per month – the lowest monthly earning bracket in the statistics.

Chapter 5

Harmful Traditional Practices

Enduring harmful traditions amidst modernisation

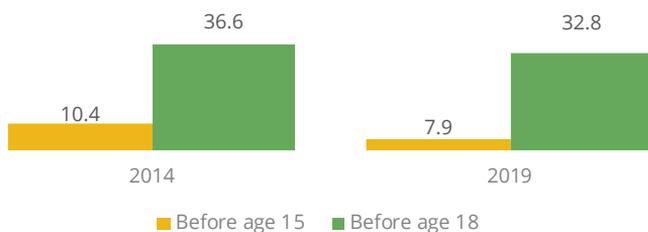
Nepal has banned harmful traditional practices affecting women, but many persist. It is for example prohibited to marry before 20. Still, one-third of girls are still married before age 18, undermining their health and education prospects. Practices ostracizing women during menstruation still affects thousands of girls and women negatively, and polygamy continues to contribute to limit women's opportunities.

Nepal is a country with strong and proud traditions going back centuries with influences from different peoples, religions and ethnicities. Most of these traditions say something about what it means to be Nepali in the 21st century in a positive way, but some of them must also be considered harmful. In a patriarchal society, it is not uncommon that some of these traditional practices are harmful for women. Most of these harmful practices are made illegal in Nepali law, but they still impact society.

High prevalence of early marriage among women

The most common of these harmful practices is the tradition of very early marriages among women. This still happens although child marriages have been illegal in Nepal since 1964, and the legal marriage age in Nepal has been 20 years of age for both women and men since 2017 (National Criminal Code Act, 2017, Article 173).

Girls married before age 15 and 18 years in age group 20-24 years (percent)

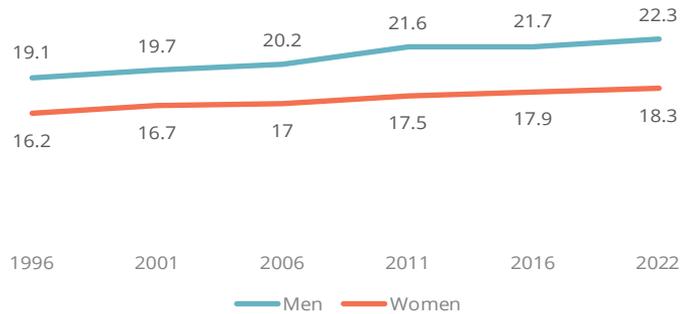


Source: Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2014 and 2019, CBS

Still, as many as one third of all girls were married before their 18th birthday, and 8 percent before they turned 15, according to survey data from 2019. There is, however, a slightly positive development over the last decade. The share of girls married before age 15 in the age group 20-24 years has declined from 10.4 percent in 2014 to 7.9 percent in 2019. Between 2014 and 2019 the share of girls married before the age of 18 declined from 36.6 percent to 32.8 percent.

The median age at first marriage also shows a positive trend. Median age at first marriage or union of women aged 25-49 has increased from 16.2 to 18.3 between 1996 and 2022. This trend shows that that the increase is steady over the years for both women and men.

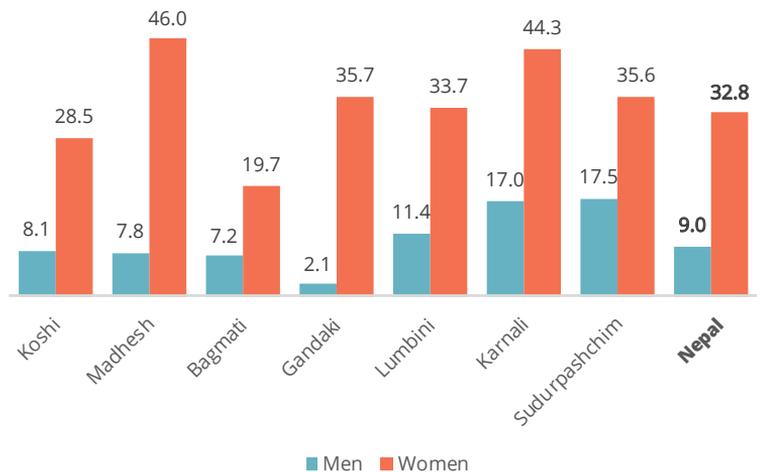
Median age at first marriage or union of age 25-49 years, 1996-2022



Source: Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 1996-2022, MoHP

Child marriage is linked with various detrimental consequences for young people, and especially for girls. The consequences include early dropout from school (Sekine, 2017), increased risk of domestic violence and being locked in a cycle of poverty. Early marriage is therefore also linked to poor health outcomes for both the mother and the children. The government of Nepal has developed a National Strategy to End Child Marriage, and Nepal has committed to ending child marriage before 2030, in line with the Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals. Education and employment programmes have been rolled out in the areas where child marriages are more prevalent.

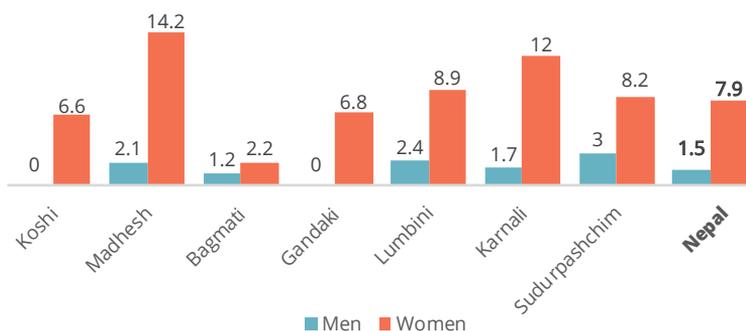
Percentage of people aged 20-24 years who were first married or were in union before the age of 18 years, 2019



Source: Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, CBS

There is prominent variation among the different provinces. Nearly one out of two women get married before the age of 18 in Madhesh and Karnali provinces. The share of women marrying before age 15 is also the highest in these two provinces. The high poverty rates in Madhesh and Karnali (Multidimension poverty of Nepal 2021) may be one of the reasons for the high prevalence of child marriage here. There are negative cultural practices contributing to early marriages, such as the belief that women go to heaven if they marry before their first menstruation. Also, marrying off girls can reduce the economic burden of poor families. In addition, there is a belief that the family pays a smaller dowry when girls marry at a younger age.

Percentage of people aged 20-24 years who were first married or were in union before the age of 15 years, 2019

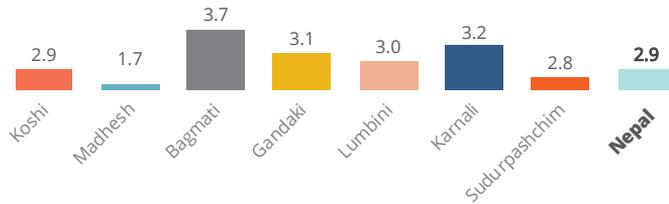


Source: Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, CBS

Polygamy still prevails – with negative consequences for women

Polygamy - the custom of having more than one husband or wife – has long traditions in Nepal. Polygyny is defined as a practice of having multiple wives, while polyandry is the practice of having more than one husband. Both are illegal in Nepal. The practice of polygynous marriage still exists in all provinces of Nepal.

Percentage of women aged 15-49 years who are in polygynous marriage/union, 2019



Source: Nepal multiple indicator cluster Survey, 2019

The highest rate of polygynous marriage is observed in Bagmati Province (3.7 percent) and the lowest in Madhesh Province (1.7 percent), whereas the national average is at 2.9 percent (2019). Consecutive NDHS surveys find that the share of married women aged 15-49 with one or more co-wives decreased from 6 percent in 1996 via 4 percent in 2006 to 2 percent in 2022.

The highest rate of polygynous marriage is observed in Bagmati Province (3.7 percent) and the lowest in Madhesh Province (1.7 percent)

Among co-wives, polygamy has been shown to cause deprivation, harm to their physical and mental health and their social welfare, and emotional and property damage to children, often with serious consequences for their well-being (Bhalla and Pearce, 2015).

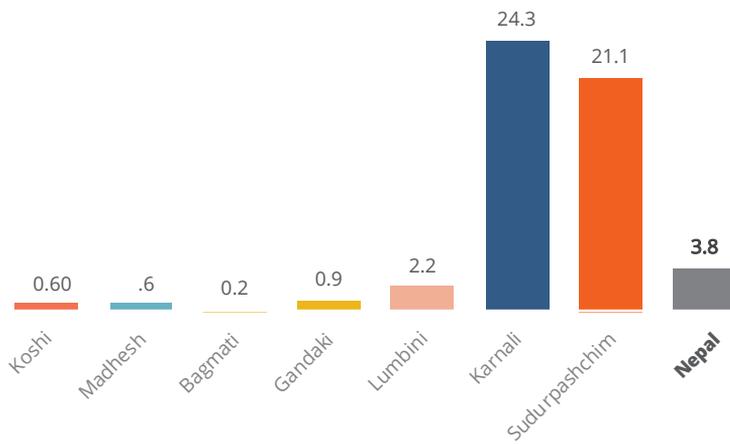
Polygamy may also be a driver of poverty, particularly in rural areas, where the husband may be the sole income earner, resulting in numbers of children and wives competing for a small amount of resources (Von Struensee, 2005).

Degrading untouchability customs during menstruations

The harmful practice of Chhaupadi has been declared illegal by court order since 2005. To implement the prohibition, the government developed Chhaupadi control guidelines in 2009. Chhaupadi was prohibited by the Criminal Code in 2017, by Article 168(3); however, the practice remains in the westernmost regions of Nepal, Sudurpashchim and Karnali. In Karnali, 24 percent of women stay in Chhaupadi during menstruation, and 21 percent in Sudurpashchim. In the other provinces, the numbers are low, giving a national average of 4 percent.

The high prevalence of Chhaupadi practices in the westernmost provinces may be a result of persisting myths around women's menstrual cycle. For instance, there are beliefs that men become ill, crops cease to bear fruit, cattle halt their milk production, and the goddess of knowledge Saraswati being displeased if a girl or woman does not stay in Chhaupadi during her menstruation.

Percentage of women who had to stay in Chaupadi due to their last menstruation in the last 12 months, 2019



Chhaupadi is a tradition of untouchability which require to live away from the home, typically in a Chapro/Cowshed, during menstruation which is constrained by cultural taboos and discriminatory social norms.

Source: Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2019

Chapter 6

Women's Empowerment

Women's political participation rises and positive signs in economic empowerment

Constitutional mandates have bolstered women's representation in federal parliament to 34 percent. This marks a significant increase from just 12.5 percent in 2007, but men are still dominating politics at local level. Women lag in economic empowerment, but positive signs include an uptick in female-managed establishments and women owning fixed assets. Additionally, there are as many women having a bank account as men.

In the Nepali context, the benchmark of women's empowerment is women's equal access to and control over economic and financial resources. The Constitution of Nepal, adopted in 2015, guarantees women's rights as a fundamental right, recognises the equality of all citizens and prohibits gender discrimination. Due to legal provisions aimed at promoting gender equality, the status of women's rights and gender equality in Nepal has shown significant progress in the political arena.

One in three representatives in Federal Parliament are women

One of the progressive constitutional mandates aimed at promoting gender equality in Nepal guarantees a minimum of 33 percent women's participation in all legislative bodies.

Women's representation in the federal parliament accounted for 34 percent of the total 334 seats contested in 2022. The share of women in the National Assembly and in the House of Representatives are 37 and 33 percent, respectively, which aligns with the mandate of having at least 33 percent women's representation in state structure guaranteed by the constitution of Nepal.

One of the progressive constitutional mandates aimed at promoting gender equality in Nepal guarantees a minimum of 33 percent women's participation in all legislative bodies.

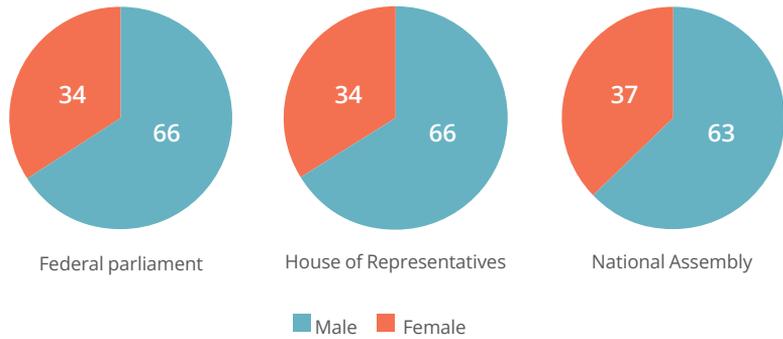
The federal parliament of Nepal consists of National Assembly and House of Representatives as two parallel houses.

The National Assembly has 59 members. Eight members are elected from each of seven provinces and three members are nominated by the President upon the recommendation of the government.

The House of Representatives has 275 members. The 165 members are elected by first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting which is directly elected electoral system and 110 are elected through proportional representation (PR) electoral system.

The proportional electoral system of representation is ensured on the basis of a closed list from women, Dalit, indigenous peoples, Khas Arya, Madhesi, Tharu, Muslims and backward regions, on the basis of population.

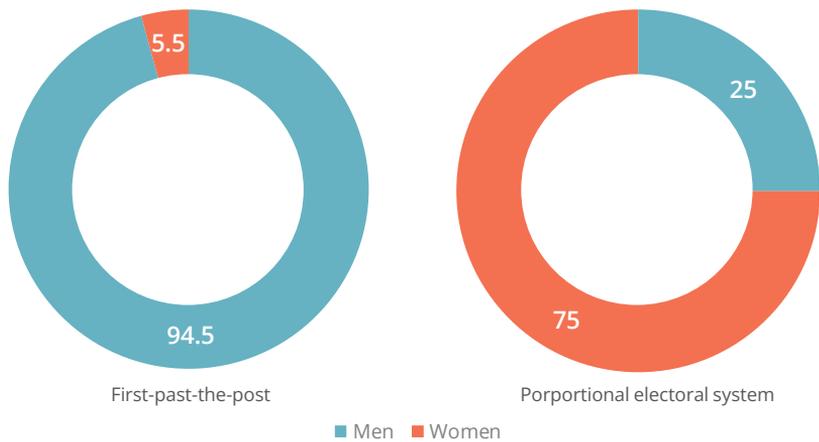
Share of men and women in federal parliament (percent), 2022



Source: Election Commission Nepal, 2022

In 2007, women accounted for only 12.5 percent (30 out of 240 elected seats) in the Constitution Assembly. The gender quota system in the constitution led to a drastic increase in women’s political representation. In the 2022 general election, women accounted for 34.1 percent of the seats in the federal parliament. The share of women was slightly higher in the National Assembly (37.3 percent) than in the House of Representatives (33.5 percent). Still, both houses reached the target for women’s representation.

Share of seats allocated to women and men in the house of representatives, by electoral system (percent), 2022



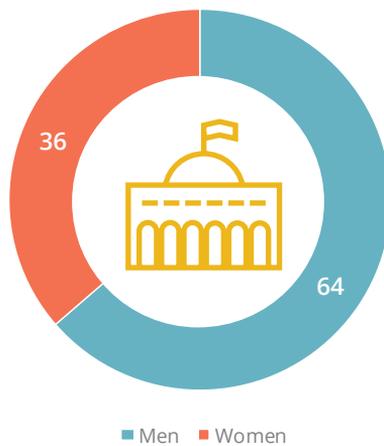
Taking a closer look at the election data, the effectiveness of the constitutionally mandated gender quota becomes apparent. Only 5.5 percent (9 out of 165 seats) of women were able to win the position in the House of Representatives through the directly elected electoral system (first-past-the-post). The mandate of women’s representation was fulfilled through the seats allocated by the proportional representation electoral system, ensuring the 33.5 percent representation of women in the House of Representatives.

Women’s representation secured by the proportional representation electoral system in provinces

About 36 percent (200 out of 550) of the representatives in the provincial parliaments are women. Only 4 percent (14 out of 330) of the seats were won by women through the directly elected electoral system. Though 36 percent (200 out of 550) of the representatives in the provincial parliaments are women, only 4 percent (14 out of 330) of the seats were won by women through the directly elected electoral system.

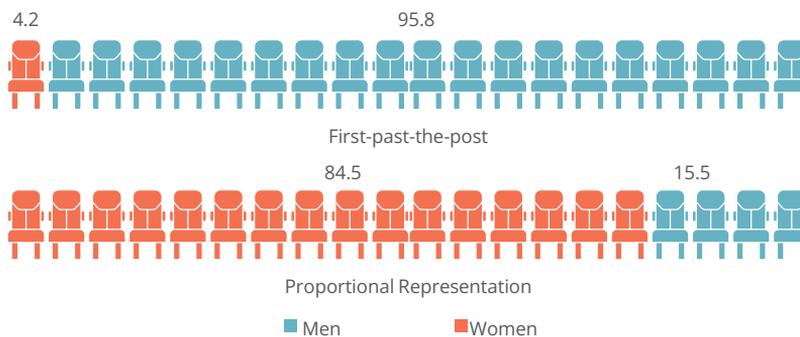
In the proportional representation (PR) electoral system, women won 84.5 percent of the seats in provincial assemblies. In other words, the election system has much influence on different groups’ access to political participation and decision-making.

Share of men and women in provincial assemblies, 2022



Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system considers the whole country as a single electoral constituency where voters exercise their preference for a party and not a candidate, allowing the representation of marginalised and disadvantaged groups in the legislatures.

Share of seats allocated to women and men in the Provincial Assemblies, by electoral system. 2022

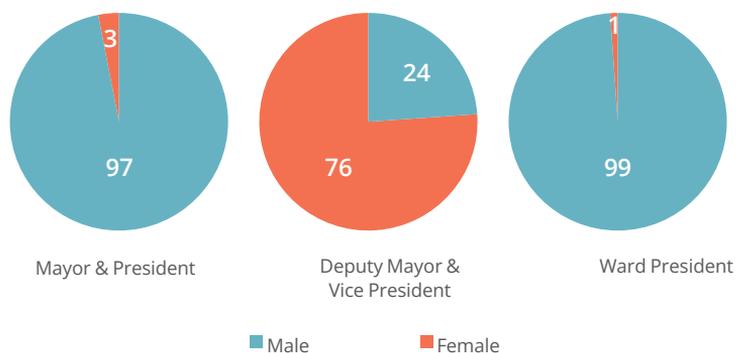


Source: Election Commission Nepal, 2022

Vital executive posts at local level are largely held by men

The constitution also mandates a minimum representation for women in local government, and the Local Election Act further mandates that each local level ward have a minimum of two female members. The Act also mandates that political parties must have at least one female candidate for either the Mayor (Chairperson)) or Deputy Mayor (Vice Chairperson)) at a local level.

Share of men and women in local governments 2022



Source: Election Commission Nepal, 2022

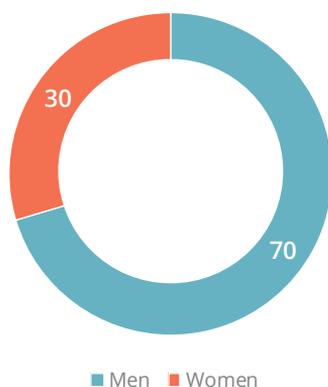
In local government, 41.2 percent of all representatives are women. However, a huge gender disparity is observed in the vital posts like Mayors, Chairpersons and Ward Chairpersons. After the local elections in 2022, only 3 percent of all Mayors and Chairpersons were women. This means that 728 of the country's 753 municipalities have a male Mayor or Chairperson, while only 25 municipalities have a woman in this role.

Whilst women accounted for 3 percent or less of the positions as Mayors or Chairpersons, they had 76 percent of the positions as Deputy Mayor or Vice Chairperson.

One in three managers in establishments are women

According to the National Economic Census 2018, there are 923,356 establishments in Nepal, 29.6 percent of which have female managers. However, the share of female managers is higher than male managers (83.6 vs 68.6 percent) in the small-scale establishments with engagement of 1-2 persons (National Economic Census, 2018 Analytical Report on Women in Business, NSO). The relatively high number of women managers in small-scale establishments may be related to the lack of economic opportunities for women elsewhere, for example lack of opportunities in the formal sector.

Share of managers in establishments by sex, 2018



Source: National Economic Census 2018, CBS

Fewer women are in civil service

Civil service is the body of government officials who are employed in government services other than political and judicial positions. These employees play an important role in the implementation of the government's policies for the welfare and well-being of the people. In 2008, only 9 percent of civil servants were women. Following a constitutional provision of 2007, when the Civil Service Act of 1993 was amended, securing positions for the under-represented groups in civil service. The number of women in civil service has increased to nearly 28 percent in 2022. This amendment reserves a certain percentage of civil service seats for women in its aim to make Nepali bureaucracy more representative and inclusive.

In 2008, only

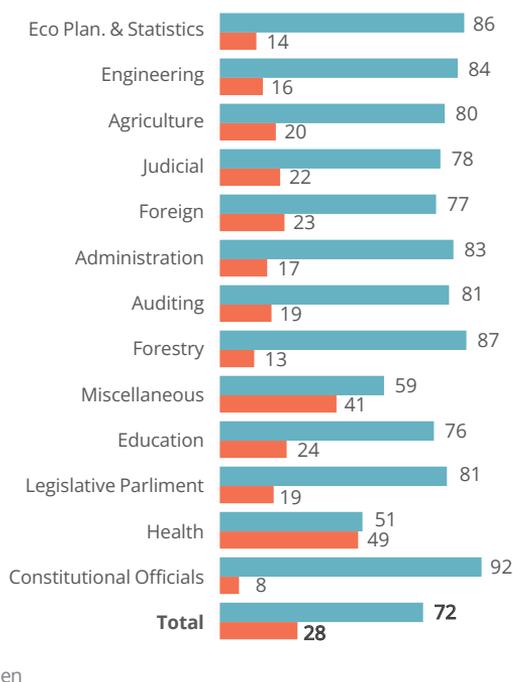
9%

of civil servants were women.

An establishment is a single physical location at which business is conducted or services or industrial operations are performed under a single ownership.

Civil Service means all positions in the services of the government of Nepal, other than the positions in the services of Army personnel, Nepal Police or Armed Police Force, Nepal and such other positions in the services as are excluded by an Act from the Civil Service.

Share of men and women in civil services (percent), 2022



Source: Department of National Personnel Records (Civil), 2023

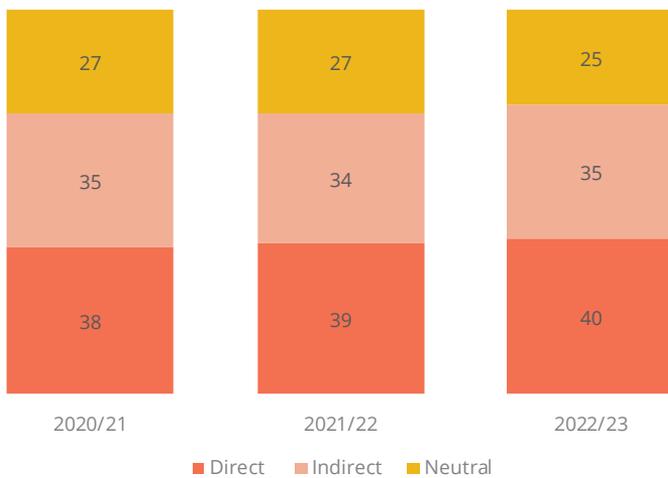
In 13 types of civil services seen as a whole, the number of female employees has increased from 12 to 26 percent from 2007/08 to 2021/22. Yet, the gender gap varies according to service. The widest gender disparity is observed in constitutional official services, while the healthcare service has almost achieved gender equality. However, this gender equality may not portray the existing disparity between men and women because the type of work done by women and men may differ even within the same service.

Women-targeted national budget is increasing

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is a strategy that incorporates a gender equality perspective into the budgetary process to ensure an efficient allocation of resources based on identified needs, and to strengthen empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming.

Since 2007, the government of Nepal's GRB strategy has demanded that all government interventions be gender-marked as directly responsive, indirectly responsive or neutral to women's progress. The GRB approach in Nepal employs a 'scoring system' that requires all expenditures to be assessed on the basis of fixed criteria including a list of indicators and sub-indicators, with pre-defined weightage.

Distribution of gender responsive budget types, 2020/21-2022/23



Directly Gender-Responsive: if the programme scores > 50 out of total score 100.

Indirectly Gender-Responsive: if the programme scores between 20 and 50 out of total score 100.

Gender-Neutral: if the programme scores less than 20 out of total score 100.

Source: Ministry of Finance

The proportion of the budget directly addressing gender responsiveness has experienced a modest uptick in the past three fiscal years, rising from 38 percent in 2020/21 to 40 percent in 2022/23.

An increase in female-headed households

The head of household is the household member who manages household activities, takes the decisions and is responsible for all household-related matters. Historically, Nepal has been a patriarchal society, and men have traditionally been the head of household. In recent years, the share of female-headed households has been increasing. In 2021, nearly one of three households in Nepal was headed by a woman, up from 15 percent in 2001.

However, looking closer into female-headed households and their marital status, census data shows that most women who are head of household can be placed into one of two categories, either widow or wife of migrant.

Domestic violence means any form of physical, mental, sexual and economic harm perpetrated by a person to a person with whom he/she has a family relationship, and this word also includes any acts of reprimand or emotional harm

Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2009

Share of households in Nepal headed by women, 2001-2021



Source: Population Census, 2001, 2011, 2021, CBS

Research suggest that female-headed households are at a higher risk of poverty and socioeconomic marginalisation, as women’s overall workload increases during men’s absence⁸. At the same time, women who are the head of the household may experience more autonomy and be more involved in paid work due to labour shortage resulted from male migration.

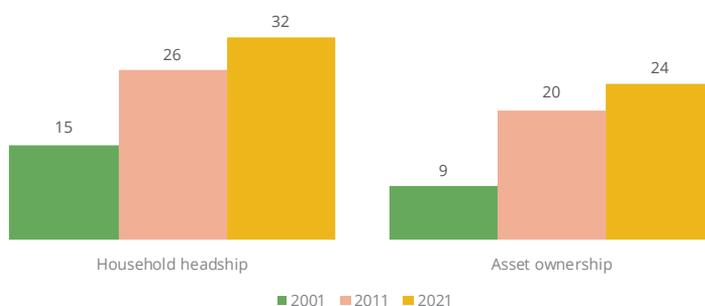
Women who serve as household heads due to male migration often have financial resources available to support their families thanks to remittances. At the same time, research has found that they often experience time constraints and reduced decision-making power. Women who assumed the role of household heads following their husband’s death or divorce encountered heightened challenges in obtaining resources such as property. However, they gained improved access to public spaces and opportunities for market work.

More women own fixed assets now than before

A major area of economic empowerment is the access to and control over economic resources such as fixed assets (land or house). Land rights equity is therefore seen as an important tool for increasing empowerment and economic welfare for women in developing countries.

In Nepal, assets, especially housing and land, are generally inherited by sons. After nearly 40 years of discriminatory laws on inheritance, the government of Nepal enacted the Code of Civil Procedure in 2017, which states that daughters are entitled to equal shares of their parents’ property. Yet, patriarchal cultural norms and tradition continue to hinder women’s access to properties, and a higher proportion of men own fixed assets than women. Still, the percentage of women who own land in Nepal has continued to rise over the past several decades.

Household headship and women’s ownership in fixed asset (land or house or both) percent, 2001-2021



Source: Population Census, 2001,2011, 2021

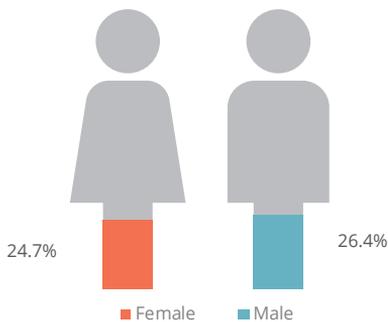
The proportion of women’s ownership has gone up from 9 percent in 2001 to 24 percent in 2021. Nepal has implemented several incentives to improve women’s ownership of land and property. A tax rebate on land registration in a woman’s name and joint ownership among spouses are any two of the most important incentives. In Nepal, several studies have found that women’s land ownership increases their household decision-making.⁹ Possessing a formal

title, however, does not automatically ensure property owner's ability to assert her property rights.

Only one out of four Nepalis has a bank account

Financial access is an important prerequisite for empowerment, which allows individuals to take control over and make decisions regarding their own money. By having access to their own bank accounts, people can save for the future and obtain credit for expanding economic activities, make payments and insure against risks.

Percentage of population having account in banking and financial institutions excluding cooperatives, 2021

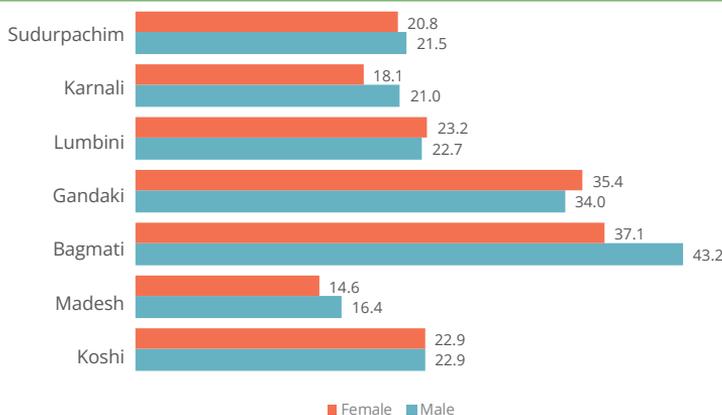


Source: National Population and Housing Census 2021, NSO

Only 25.6 percent of the Nepali population has a bank account, according to census data from 2021. On a national level, 26.4 percent of men have a bank account compared with 24.7 percent of women. The gap on a national level is therefore almost two percentage points in favour of men. On a province level however, there are bigger differences. In Bagmati province that encompasses the capital, there is a 6 percent difference in favour of men, where 43.2 percent of bank account holders are men versus 37.1 percent who are women. At the same time, Bagmati has the highest share of bank account holders for both sexes, compared to other provinces.

Only **25.6%** of the Nepali population has a bank account, according to census data from 2021.

Bank account holders per sex and province (percent) 2021



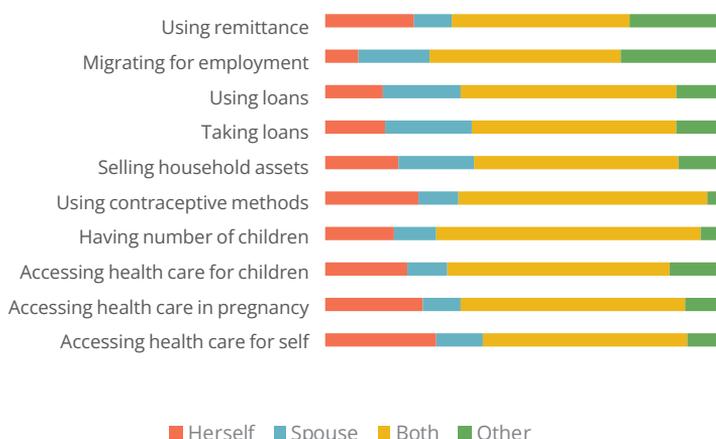
Source: National Population and Housing Census 2021, NSO

In two provinces – Lumbini and Gandaki – there are more female bank account holders than male, while in Koshi the share is identical for men and women. In the rest of the provinces, there are more male than female bank account holders.

Fewer women have decision-making power in financial issues

Women’s decision-making power in the household is an important measure of empowerment. On the question on who takes the final decision in the household, most women responded that husbands and wives take the decisions jointly. However, in quite a few of the areas husbands make decisions to a larger extent than wives.

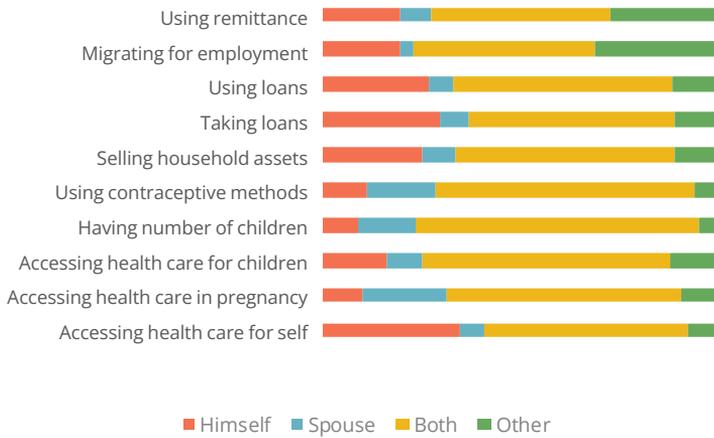
Distribution of household decisions reported by female household head or spouse of male household head in the last 12 months



Source: Nepal Living Standards Survey, 2010/11

In the areas of using and taking out loans, men have greater decision-making power than women. This indicates that women have less power over the finances of the household than their husbands. Migration for employment is also an area where men decide to a larger extent than women, at 17.8 percent of the cases, compared to women deciding in 8.5 percent of the cases. 28 percent of women report to have final decision-making power in accessing healthcare for themselves.

Distribution of household decisions reported by female household head or spouse of male household head in the last 12 months



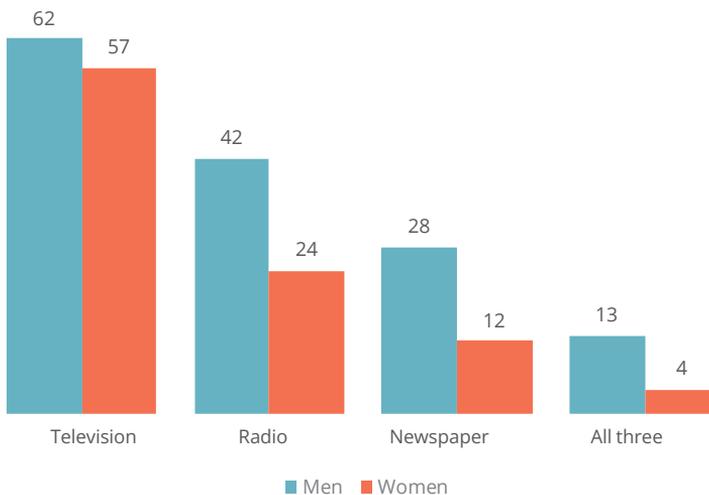
Source: Nepal Living Standards Survey, 2010/11

Women in Nepal are less exposed to mass media

Mass media such as newspapers, radio, television play an important role in how people form their identities, social norms and values. Access to information empowers women to claim their rights and make better decisions in their everyday life.

Women are less exposed to mass media compared to men. According to the Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey from 2019, television is the most popular form of media in Nepal for both men and women, and they have almost equal access to television. However, a far greater share of men has access to radio and newspapers, compared to women.

Exposure to mass media (percent), 2019



Source: Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, NSO

Chapter 7

Women's Safety

Increase in reports of gender-based violence, and high incidence of female suicides

Gender-based violence cases reported to the police have been increasing from 15,500 cases in 2018 to more than 21,000 in 2022. Domestic violence accounts for 80 percent of reported cases. Increased awareness and government efforts may have facilitated the increase in reporting, though underreporting persists. Suicide is the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age, with almost 3,000 cases recorded in 2021. Research finds that experiences of violence is a main factor behind female suicides.

Crimes against women

Violence against women has been accepted worldwide as a violation of basic human rights. In 1993, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) gave a universal definition of gender-based violence as violence occurring in public or in private life based on gender. Gender-based violence has a significant cost to society, as violence limits social participation. The government has initiated measures to prevent violence and to ensure access to justice for victims of violence.

One important measure to prevent and address gender-based violence and violence against children and senior citizens is the establishment of Women, Children and Senior Citizens Units within Nepal police. The units are now operating in all 77 districts of Nepal. National Women's Commission operates a helpline, 1145, for case reporting from women who experience violence throughout the country.

Domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women

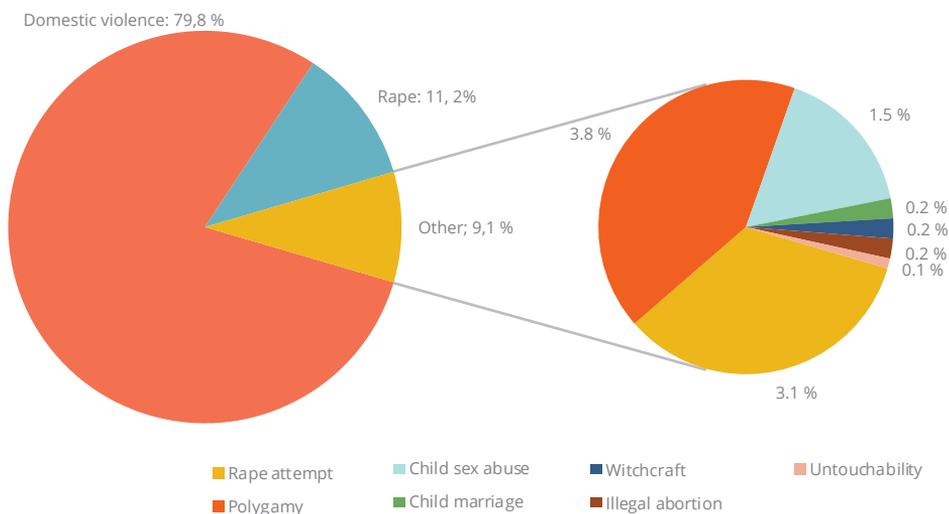
Of all reported crimes, domestic violence accounts for the highest proportion, at 80 percent. Domestic violence is defined as any form of physical harm perpetrated by a person to a person with whom he or she has a family relationship. Cases of rape and attempted rape reported to the police account for 11 and 3 percent of total reported cases, respectively.

Definition of trafficking in the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, 2007:

If anyone commits any of the following acts, that shall be deemed to have committed human trafficking:

- (a) To sell or purchase a person for any purpose,*
- (b) To use someone into prostitution, with or without any benefit,*
- (c) To extract human organ except otherwise determined by law,*
- (d) To go for prostitution.*

Total crimes reported to the women, children and senior citizens police by type and share of total, 2021/22



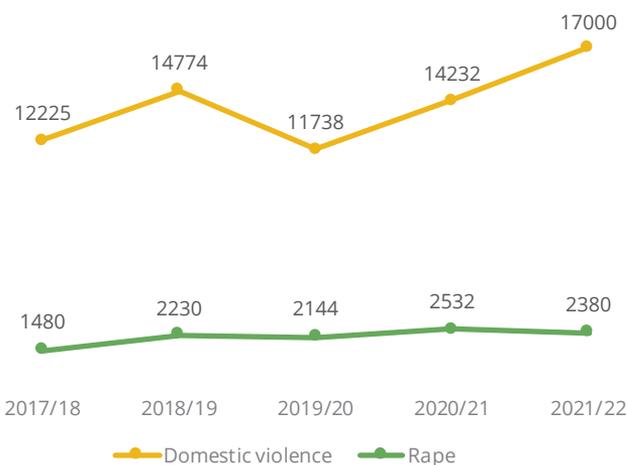
Source: Nepal Police Headquarters, Crime Investigation Department, Records and Analysis Section, 2017/18-2021/22

Increased number of crimes against women reported to the police

The total number of reported crimes against women, including domestic violence, rape and others, increased from 15,559 in 2017/18 to 21,311 in 2021/22.

The number of domestic cases reported increased from 12,225 in 2017/18 to 17,000 in 2021/22. Reported rape cases also increased, from 1480 to 2380 in the same period.

Crime reported to police, with women victims (reported cases), 2017/18-2021/22



Source: Nepal Police Headquarters, Crime Investigation Department, Records and Analysis Section, 2017/18-2021/22

The police received 655 reports of polygamy in 2021/22, making up 3.8 percent of all cases, whereas child sex abuse cases made up 1.5 percent of cases. The number of reports increased from 182 cases of child abuse in 2017/18 to 314 cases reported in 2021/22.

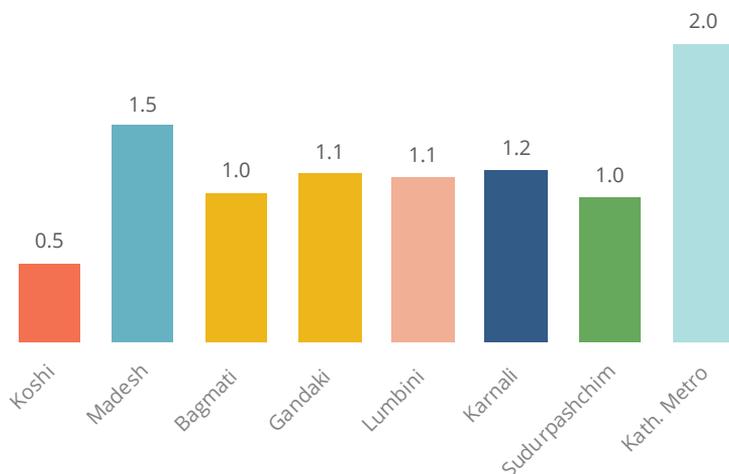
In addition to extending the number of police office units Women, Children and Senior Citizens Service Centres to a total of 232 units in all 77 districts, the government, in cooperation with several stakeholders, have conducted women’s empowerment programmes promoting zero tolerance for violence. These programmes are designed to empower and enable women to come forward and report violence. This means that the increase in number of *reported cases* does not necessarily mean that the prevalence of violence has increased, but that more women are empowered to report the injustices taking place.

More cases of domestic violence reported in capital region

There are significant regional differences in domestic violence report rates in Nepal, with the capital, Kathmandu, reporting a higher rate of 2 cases per 1000 inhabitants. Other regions report approximately 1 case per 1000 inhabitants, with slight variations ranging from 0.5 to 1.2 cases.

Many factors can influence the reporting rate, including access to and knowledge of police stations, number of police stations, geography, poverty, literacy, stigma and shame related to being a victim of violence. The higher report rate in Kathmandu is likely attributable to better access to police stations, higher levels of education and awareness, and also to the existence of support programmes for violence survivors in Kathmandu.

Domestic violence cases (per 1000 population), 2021/22



Source: Nepal Police Headquarters, Crime Investigation Department, Records and Analysis Section, 2021/22

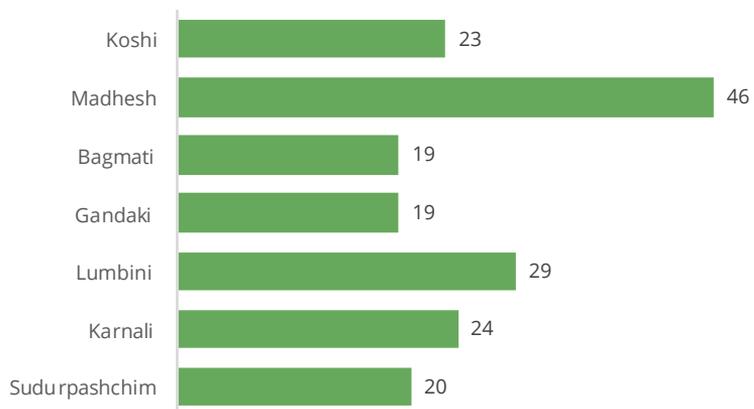
The government aims to increase the reporting rate in all provinces, to be better able to both prevent and prosecute for violence against women, children and senior citizens and to provide access to justice on equal par to all of society.

Prevalence of domestic violence highest in Madhesh region

The prevalence of domestic violence in society as a whole will be higher than the cases reported to the police. Across Nepal, the numbers of women experiencing domestic violence and intimate partner violence are high, but not all cases are reported.

In the NDHS survey from 2022, for example, almost half of women (46 percent) in the Madhesh province who have ever had a husband or intimate partner have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence by their partner. Although Madhesh stands out, the prevalence is also very high in all regions at 29 percent in Lumbini Province, and between 19 percent (Bagmati and Gandaki) and 24 percent in the remaining regions.

Intimate partner violence by province (percent), 2022



Source: Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2022

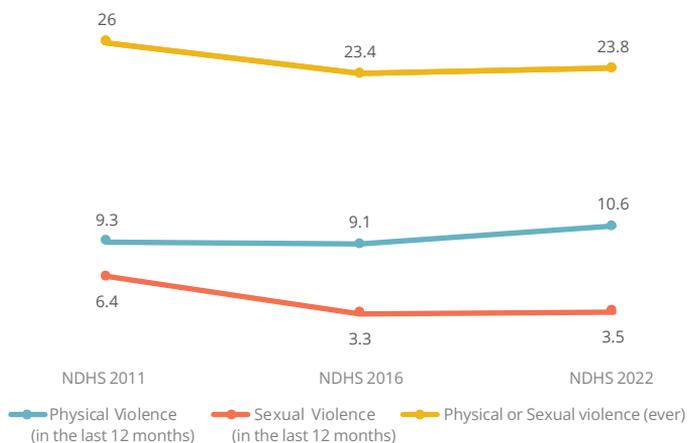
It is difficult to say exactly why these differences occur between the provinces, but according to a study on spousal violence in Nepal, based on DHS data, women without any education were 1.7 times more likely to experience violence. Low age at first marriage, lack of economic empowerment, husband's level of education and consumption of alcohol were also factors associated with domestic violence in rural Nepal (Paudel, 2021).

A quarter of women experience violence at some point in their lives

The Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2022 found that 24 percent of all women have experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Sixteen percent have experienced physical violence and 1.3 percent have experienced sexual violence in the last year. The prevalence of both physical

and sexual violence has declined marginally in the surveys from 2011 to 2022. Different forms of physical violence in total have decreased slightly between 2011 and 2016; however, experiencing “physical violence only” has increased. It is also important to note that some women might not feel able to talk openly about violence, even in an anonymous survey.

Women 15-49 years who have experienced various forms of violence in the last 12 months (percent), 2011-2022

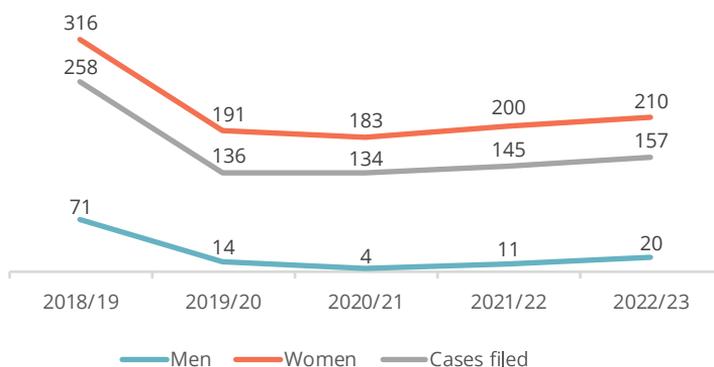


Source: Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2011-2022, MoHP
 Due to limited access to and control over resources, as well as inadequate management of women's safety, physical and sexual violence continue to prevail.

Women and girls are vulnerable to human trafficking

The numbers of reports to the police concerning victims of human trafficking has decreased from 387 to 211 between 2018/19 and 2021/22. Nine out of ten police reports of human trafficking concern women, but the number of cases has gone down for both women and men. Two-thirds of the cases were filed against the culprits, and taking action against human trafficking has been strengthened from the side of the government.

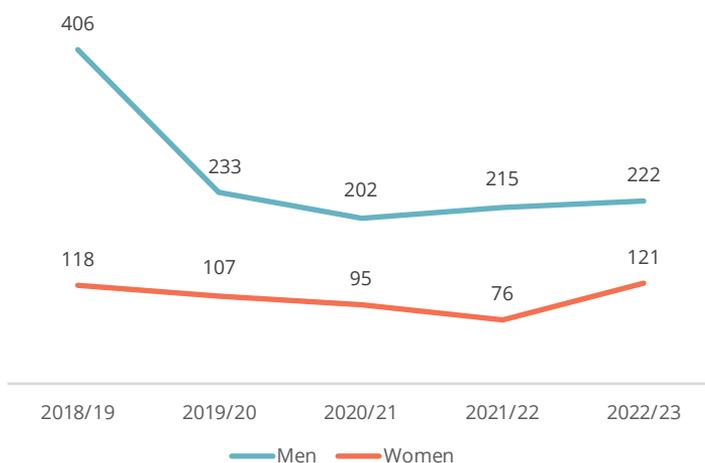
Human trafficking cases reported to the police, 2018/19 - 2022/23



Source: Anti-Human Trafficking Bureau of Nepal Police, 2018/19-2021/22

Human trafficking is a severe human rights violation that disproportionately affects women and girls. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to a range of factors, such as poverty, gender discrimination, lack of education and employment opportunities, and limited access to healthcare. Women who belong to marginalised communities, such as indigenous or ethnic minorities, or those who are migrants, are especially at risk of trafficking. Traffickers often prey on vulnerable women, promising them better job opportunities or a better life abroad. In 2022, the National Human Right Commission of Nepal estimated that 1.9 million Nepali were vulnerable to human trafficking.

Cases of perpetrators reported for human trafficking (in numbers), 2018/19-2022/23



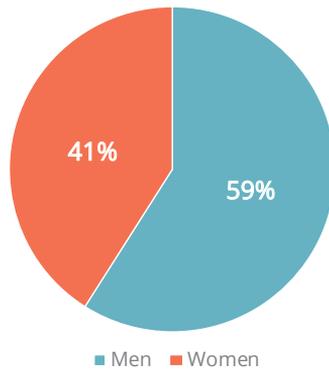
Preventing and prosecuting for human trafficking is a priority of the government of Nepal. The Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, 2007 and Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Regulation, 2008 have provisioned anti-human trafficking laws in Nepal. The Human Trafficking Investigation Bureau of Nepal police, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, National Women’s Commission and National Human Rights Commission are the responsible agencies for the prevention of human trafficking.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among women of reproductive age

Suicide is a public health, human rights and a gender issue. Suicide has become the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age in Nepal, taking over from maternal mortality as these rates have declined (Simkhada et al.).

In 2020/21, police recorded 4222 suicides by men and 2919 suicides by women. In the police figures, of every 10 individuals who commit suicide, four are women and six are men.

Suicides recorded by police, by sex, 2020/21



Source: Nepal Police Headquarters, Crime Investigation Department, Records and Analysis Section, 2017/18-2020/21

Compared with the global numbers, women's suicide rate is closer to that of men's in Nepal than in other countries. Globally, the suicide rate for men is 2.3 times higher for men than for women, whereas in Nepal the suicide rate for men is only 1.4 times higher than for women (WHO, 2019).

The statistics also show that in 2019/20, the suicide rates for both women and men were higher than in other years, and men's suicide rates were almost twice as high as women's in that year. This may have had to do with restrictions during the COVID pandemic, for instance making it harder for many men to make enough money. However, there is uncertainty connected to these figures, as the police-reported suicides in Nepal are higher than the WHO suicide figures for Nepal.

Suicide rates for men and women, 2017/2018-2020/21



Source: Nepal Police Headquarters, Crime Investigation Department, Records and Analysis Section, 2017/18-2020/21

Experiences of violence might be reasons behind high suicide figures

According to a study, abuse, marital disputes and relationship problems were some of the most commonly cited factors leading to suicide for Nepali women (Sarina Pradhan Kasaju et.al., 2021). In addition, through autopsy reports it was found that 61 percent of women who had committed suicide had experienced physical abuse within three months before the suicide. Of the women of reproductive age who committed suicide, 73 percent were married.

Policies to prevent suicides

The annual suicide rate in Nepal has been increasing over the last years. In light of this, the Women and Social Parliamentary Committee has instructed the Ministry of Health and Population to initiate suicide prevention measures. One such measure is that the Government of Nepal set up a suicide prevention helpline, 1166, in May 2021.

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