

# **NEPAL COUNTRY INEQUALITY REPORT (CIR 2025)**



**NGO Federation of Nepal**

# **Nepal Country Inequality Report (CIR 2025)**



**NGO Federation of Nepal**  
Buddhanagar, Kathmandu



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# Acknowledgement

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The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 (CIR 2025) builds on the foundation of CIR 2019 (Fighting Inequality in Nepal: The Road to Prosperity) launched in 2019. It is not only a follow-up, but a deeper, more detailed examination of inequality in Nepal. It provides compelling evidence that social, economic, and political inequalities are deeply systemic, embedded within Nepal's society, institutions, and governance structures.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a pivotal role in engaging with grassroots communities, ensuring that the voices of the most marginalized are heard and represented. This report offers a critical perspectives on the various faces of inequality of such groups in Nepal.

As the nature of the report, Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 (CIR 2025) delves into specific Inequalities in areas such as Migration; Political and Structural; Health; Income and Wealth; Climate Change and Disaster; Education; and Food and Hunger. The thematic reports provided specific insights into the areas where urgent attention and action required from the government, CSOs and private sector.

This report is not only a study but a call to urgent action. We call upon the policymakers, governments, civil society organizations, and all other stakeholders to forge a resilient and just future, where every citizen has an inherent right to live with dignity in Nepal. We hope this report serves as a bedrock for transformational actions to achieve security, justice and equality.

NGO Federation of Nepal acknowledges that this report is a product of contributions in terms of writing, advice, editing, review, and financing from our valuable partners, collaborators and expresses gratitude to all for this support. We extend our thanks to Shanta Lal Mulmi (Adviser, NFN), Dr. Padma P. Khatiwada (Associate Professor, Tribhuvan University), Bhawana Bhatta (Past Vice Chairperson, NFN), Sita Lama (Vice President, Gefont), Ganga Bahadur Gautam (President, Youth Initiative), Dr. Bishnu Raj Upreti (Research Director, NCCR), Dr. Posh Raj Pandey (Economist), Naren Khatiwada (Adviser, Youth Advocacy Nepal), Dr. SP Kalaunee (Chairperson, AIN) for their initial contribution in shaping the report.

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# List of Abbreviation


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ANC	Antenatal Care
AoSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
BJM	British Medical Journal
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CAPA	Community Adaptation Plans of Action
CBS	Center Bureau of Statistics
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEHRD	Center for Education and Human Resource Development
COP	Conference of the Parties
CPN	Communist Party of Nepal
CPN (UML)	Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist)
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRI	Climate Risk Index
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DRRM	Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECED	Early Childhood Education and Development
EFA	Education for All
ERO	Education Review Office
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FEP	Foreign Employment Policy
FPTP	First Past the Post
FY	Fiscal Year
GCAP	Global Climate Adaptation Partnership
GCM	Global Compact for Migration
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GFMD	Global Forum on Migration and Development
GHG	Green House Gas
GoN	Government of Nepal
HAMI	Human Accountability Monitoring Initiative
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IDS	Integrated Development Society Nepal
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization of Migration
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
L&D	Loss and Damage
LAPA	Local Adaptation Plans of Action
LDCRP	Local Disaster and Climate Resilience Plan
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and the "+" represent other diverse sexual orientation, gender identities and expression.
LMICs	Low and Middle-Income Countries
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MAD	Minimum Acceptable Diet
mCPR	Modern Contraceptive Prevalence Rate
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
MOEST	Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology
MoFE	Ministry of Forestry and Environment
MoHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOLESS	Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security
MoPE	Ministry of Population and Environment
MoSTE	Ministry of Science Technology and Environment
MTR	Mid-term Report
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NASL	National Assessment of Student Learning

NCD	Non-communicable Disease
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NDHS	Nepal Demographic and Health Survey
NDRRMA	National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority
NER	Net Enrollment Ratio
NHRC	National Health Research Council
NLSS	Nepal Living Standard Survey
NMR	Neonatal Mortality Rate
NPC	Nepal Planning Commission
NPR	Nepalese Rupees
NRB	Nepal Rastra Bank
NSO	National Statistics Office
NTFP	Non-timber Forest Product
PAC	Practical Action Consulting
PNC	Postnatal Care
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PR	Proportional Representation
PWDs	People with Disabilities
RCP	Representative Concentration Pathways
RM	Rural Municipality
SAAPE	South Asian Alliance for Poverty Reduction
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SFDRR	Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SSDP	School Sector Development Plan
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UGC	University Grant Commission
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nation Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization





UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WB	World Bank
WDI	World Development Indicators
WECS	Water and Energy Commission Secretariat
WHO	World Health Organization
WIM	Warsaw International Mechanism

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# Introduction

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The most recent Nepal Country Inequality Report (Nepal CIR) was launched in 2019. The Nepal CIR 2025 builds on that foundation — not only as a follow-up, but as a deeper, more detailed examination of inequality in Nepal. It provides compelling evidence that social, economic, and political inequalities are deeply systemic, embedded within Nepal's society, institutions, and governance structures.

These inequalities are rooted in historical systemic and structural hierarchies based on gender, caste, ethnicity, class, region, religion, age, and other forms of discrimination, exclusion, expropriation, and exploitation. Women, Dalits, Indigenous Peoples, Madhesis, Queer people, and those living in remote rural areas, marginal urban spaces, or climate-vulnerable zones experience multiple, intersecting forms of vulnerability, deprivation, and suffering. Their fundamental rights — to dignity, freedom, agency, life, livelihood, education, health, shelter, and democratic participation — are persistently denied.

While the report acknowledges progress on several fronts over the past years, it highlights that such progress remains uneven and unequal. Those historically privileged by unjust systemic hierarchies continue to benefit disproportionately, thereby not only sustaining historical inequalities but also generating new forms of injustice — such as climate crisis-induced disaster vulnerability, loss, and damage.

Nepal CIR 2025 explores the intersections of multiple inequalities, particularly in the areas of climate, education, food, health, migration, politics, and wealth. It offers critical insights into how growing social, political, cultural, and economic inequalities are worsening the conditions of marginalized people and communities.

This report is a call to action — directed especially at the state, corporations, and all powerholders — to put the eradication of systemic and structural inequalities at the center of their agendas. It also serves as a resource for civil society organizations and policymakers to address inequality effectively. By providing robust knowledge and evidence, it empowers marginalized people and communities to advocate for and claim equality.

Nepal CIR 2025 aims to mobilize public opinion, solidarity, and collective action to hold the state, corporations, and each other accountable for creating "equitable peace, prosperity, and progress for all."

The Nepal CIR 2025 is the product of a truly collaborative and complementary effort by an inter-disciplinary and inter-generational group of academics, researchers, and development/media practitioners. It is a collection of individual and independent reports, preserving the diversity of approach and style of each author. It is not a book of standardized, edited chapters.

Following the Executive Summary, Methodology, and a list of Abbreviations, the report presents seven individual studies, organized alphabetically by the type of inequality: climate change-induced disaster, education, food, health, income/wealth, migration, and politics. A combined list of references, separated by each report, is provided at the end.

The Executive Summary and the full versions of the seven standalone reports are available online at: <https://ngofederation.org/categories/16/Research-Reports>



## Methodology

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The Country Inequality report (CIR, 2025) adopts a qualitative and evidence-based, desk research and stakeholder consultations. The report brings together analyses across seven interconnected themes—Education; Income and Wealth; Food and Hunger; Climate Change; Health; Migration; and Political and Structural Inequalities—to provide a comprehensive picture of inequality in Nepal.

The report-writing process began with an expert consultation, which helped shape the overall framework and scope. This was followed by a multi-stakeholders' consultation workshop involving representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs), academia, media, activists, and other key sectors. Their insights were instrumental in identifying gaps, validating emerging themes, and enriching the narrative with grounded perspectives.

The report relies on secondary data from government reports, academic papers, policy briefs, research studies, civil society publications, and datasets from national and international organizations. Both published and unpublished documents from 2015 onward were reviewed. Nepal Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS), Nepal Living Standards Survey, NASA report, and flash reports were the major sources of quantitative information. Government websites and online sources were also consulted, especially for themes such as climate change, health, and migration.

Thematic experts employed content analysis and thematic categorization methods to analyze the data. Each theme also incorporated an intersectional lens to understand how various forms of disadvantage, such as gender, caste, ethnicity, geography, disability, language, and socio-economic status interact to deepen inequality. For instance, the education section highlights how a disabled Dalit girl in a disaster-prone region may face compounded barriers, illustrating the importance of considering overlapping vulnerabilities.

Each thematic section maintained analytical rigor, thematic coherence, and relevance to highlight holistic, inclusive, and actionable understanding of inequality in Nepal, one that is rooted in data, enriched by lived experiences, and aligned with equity-driven policy and areas for advocacy.

Each thematic report was thoroughly reviewed and revised by experts for its analytical rigor, thematic consistency, and alignment with national and global discourses on inequality.

# Climate Change Induced Disaster Loss and Damage Inequality

- Rishi Adhikari

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# Introduction

*For families that have lost their home to storms; for communities forced to abandon their villages by rising rivers: loss and damage is not a negotiating point or a bureaucratic abstraction. It is a lifeline: UN Secretary-General António Guterres! (United Nations, 2023)*

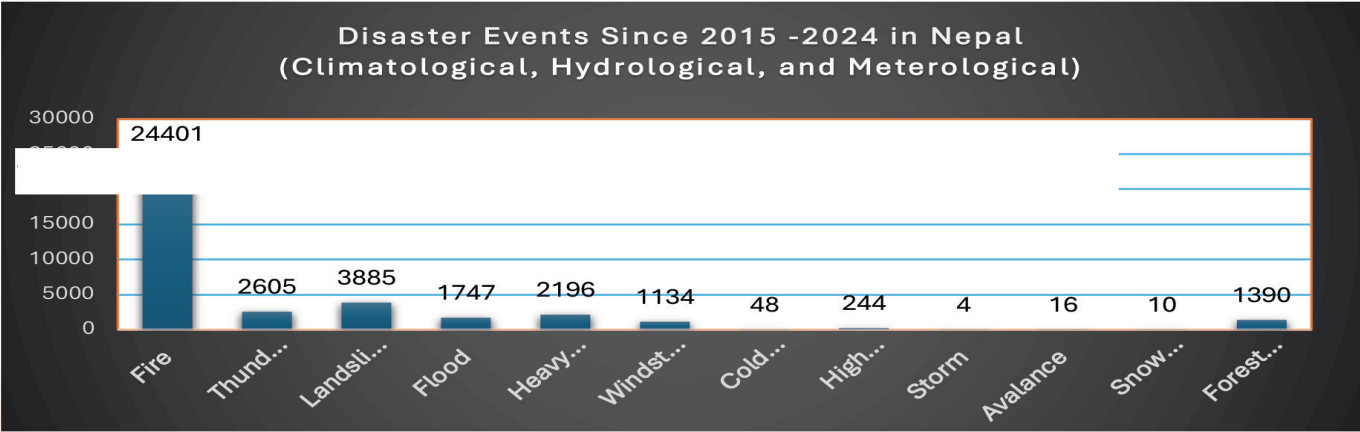
## Understanding Climate Change Induced Loss and Damage: Global and National Perspectives

Nepal is highly vulnerable to multiple hazards, including earthquakes, floods, landslides, droughts, and extreme weather events. The causes of disasters vary, climate change-induced disasters are increasingly dominant, leading to unexpected and severe impacts on people's lives. Due to its topography and climatic conditions, it is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, ranking 20<sup>th</sup> in disaster risk (Oxfam International, 2019). However, Climate Risk Index (CRI) 2025, present different finding: Nepal ranked 10<sup>th</sup> among the affected countries (2000–2019) in 2021, with 0.82 deaths per 100,000 people and economic losses of \$233.06 million (PPP), equivalent to 0.39 percent of GDP. Similarly, in 2019, Nepal ranked 12<sup>th</sup>, experiencing significant fatalities but lower financial losses. However, in the long-term ranking (1993–2022), published in 2025, Nepal's position dropped to 69<sup>th</sup>, with a lower death rate and a CRI score of 0.06. Despite, this decline in ranking, the country still faced substantial economic losses, amounting to \$221.33 million (PPP), or 0.258 percent of GDP, due to disasters (CRI, 2025).

Over 80 percent of the disaster are hydro-meteorological in origin, and their seasonal patterns are becoming increasingly unpredictable, leading to severe impacts on lives and livelihoods. Regional weather and hydrological systems also influence these disasters (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022). Further, disasters disproportionately affect marginalized groups, including women, children, adolescents, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and remote communities with limited resources. Agriculture-dependent populations face high exposure, while poverty, exclusion, urbanization, and migration further increase risks, especially in hazard-prone areas.

The impact of climate change can be seen across all hazard types (hydrological, climatological, meteorological, and biological) except geophysical (earthquake, rockfall, etc.), and human-induced disasters (road, industrial, and chemical accidents, etc.) which are revealed in Figure 1 herewith:

**Figure 1: Major climate change induced incidents in Nepal**

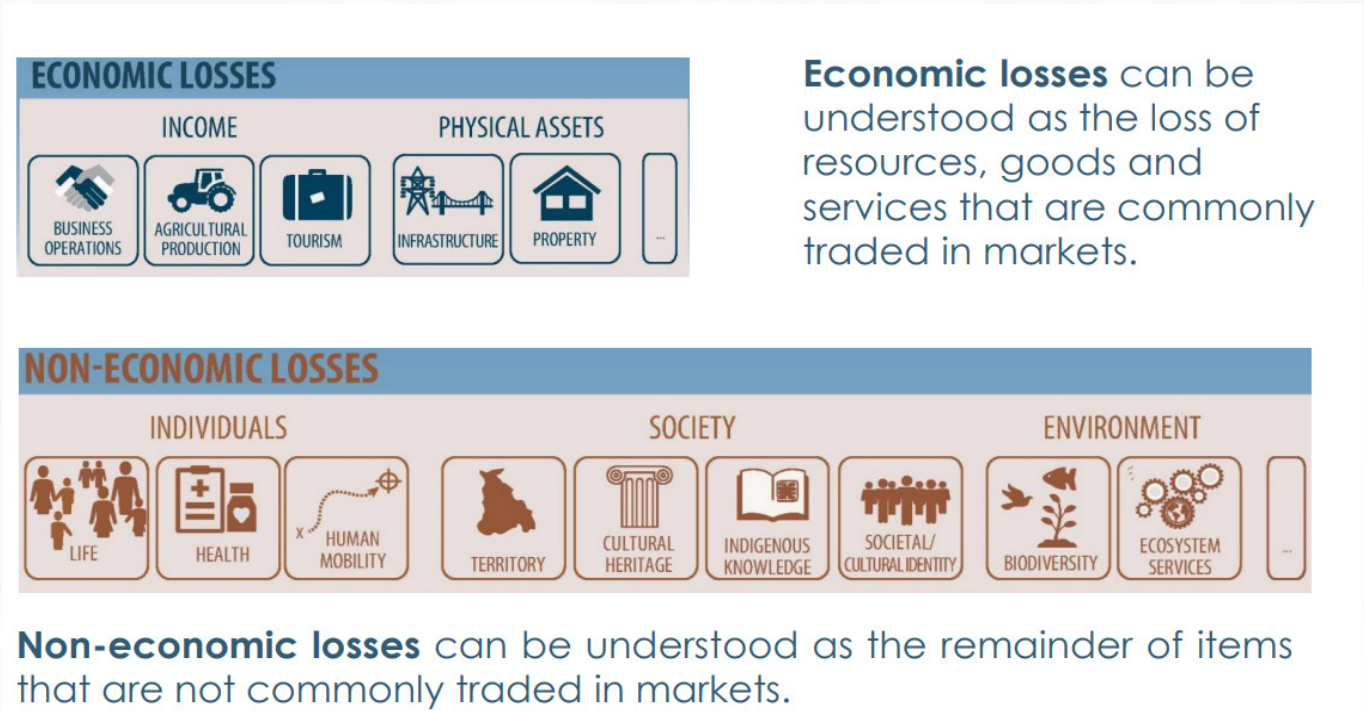


Source: DRR portal, bipadportal.gov.np



These disasters primarily result in two types of losses: **economic and non-economic**. Loss and Damage (L&D) is understood in both these dimensions. Economic losses include resources, goods, and services that have monetary value and can be quantified. Non-economic losses, on the other hand, involve aspects that cannot be bought or sold in the market, such as loss of life, health, displacement and human mobility, territory, cultural heritage, indigenous/local knowledge, biodiversity, and ecosystem services. The details of the different types of climate change-induced loss and damage are presented in Figure 2 below:

**Figure 2: Types of Loss and Damage**



**Source:** *Technical paper on non-economic losses, UNFCCC (2012)*

Additionally, the availability of data, information, facts, figures, and policies designed to create an enabling environment for addressing climate change impacts, also remains unclear to explain the growing inequality caused by climate change-induced disaster loss and damage. The absence of such a mechanism limits a comprehensive understanding of how climate change disproportionately affects different groups of people, communities, and localities. Therefore, this study aims to develop a structured framework to identify and better explain the key determinants of climate change-induced inequality in Nepal.

## Climate Induced Disaster Loss and Damage: Discussion and Findings

### Decoding Climate Induced Disasters Loss and Damage

Loss and damage refer to the adverse impacts of climate change on human systems, often resulting from disruptions in natural systems. Climate Change induced incidents such as sea-level rise, glacial melt, and extreme weather events trigger cascading effects, leading to loss of lives,

habitable land, freshwater resources, livelihoods, and infrastructure. While human vulnerabilities such as poverty, adverse development policies, and socio-economic dependencies can amplify these impacts, climate change is emerging as a main cause of the loss and damage. Loss and damage occur when adaptation measures are insufficient or when climate shifts exceed the capacity of communities to cope, leading to irreversible consequences for ecosystems and human well-being (UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Implementation, 2012).

The Paris Agreement (United Nations 2015) encourages the parties to enhance their understanding, action, and support for loss and damage through cooperative and facilitative approaches, particularly within the framework of WIM. Furthermore, at COP27 in 2022, the establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund was agreed upon to provide financial support to the countries most affected by climate change (United Nations, 2015).

In the national context, loss and damage are defined with an emphasis on its ecological and social diversity. The National Framework on Climate Change Induced Loss and Damage (October 2021) defines loss and damage as the actual and/or potential negative impacts of climate change. This includes sudden-onset extreme events such as heatwaves and extreme rainfall, as well as slow-onset events like snow loss, droughts, and glacial retreat. These impacts particularly affect people in Nepal’s mountains, hills, and terai, where the natural ecosystem, infrastructure, and institutions are overwhelmed, leading to loss of lives, livelihoods, and cultural heritage. However, the understanding of loss and damage remains generalised in the country’s context. This generalized understanding has led to the development of umbrella frameworks at the national level. While these frameworks provide a broad concept, they are not effective in addressing the specific climate risks and exposures faced by the most vulnerable groups at the local level. The process of developing a clear understanding of L&D has some historical context. The table below provides an overview of L&D under the UNFCCC processes.

**Table 1: The history of L&D under the UNFCCC process**

<b>1991</b>	On behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AoSIS), Vanuatu proposed an insurance facility to compensate Small Island Developing States (SIDS) for losses caused by sea-level rise.
<b>2007</b>	Parties to the convention during COP13 agreed to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts in developing countries particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change’.
<b>2010</b>	During COP 16 in Cancun, parties agreed to establish a ‘work program to consider approaches to address loss and damage associated with climate change impacts in developing countries.
<b>2012</b>	The role of the COP in addressing L&D is agreed upon in COP 18.
<b>2013</b>	During COP 19 in Warsaw, parties agreed to establish WIM for L&D and its executive committee.
<b>2015</b>	In Paris, WIM was anchored in the Paris Agreement through Article 8. Parties agreed to ‘averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events, and the role of sustainable development in reducing the risk of loss and damage.’



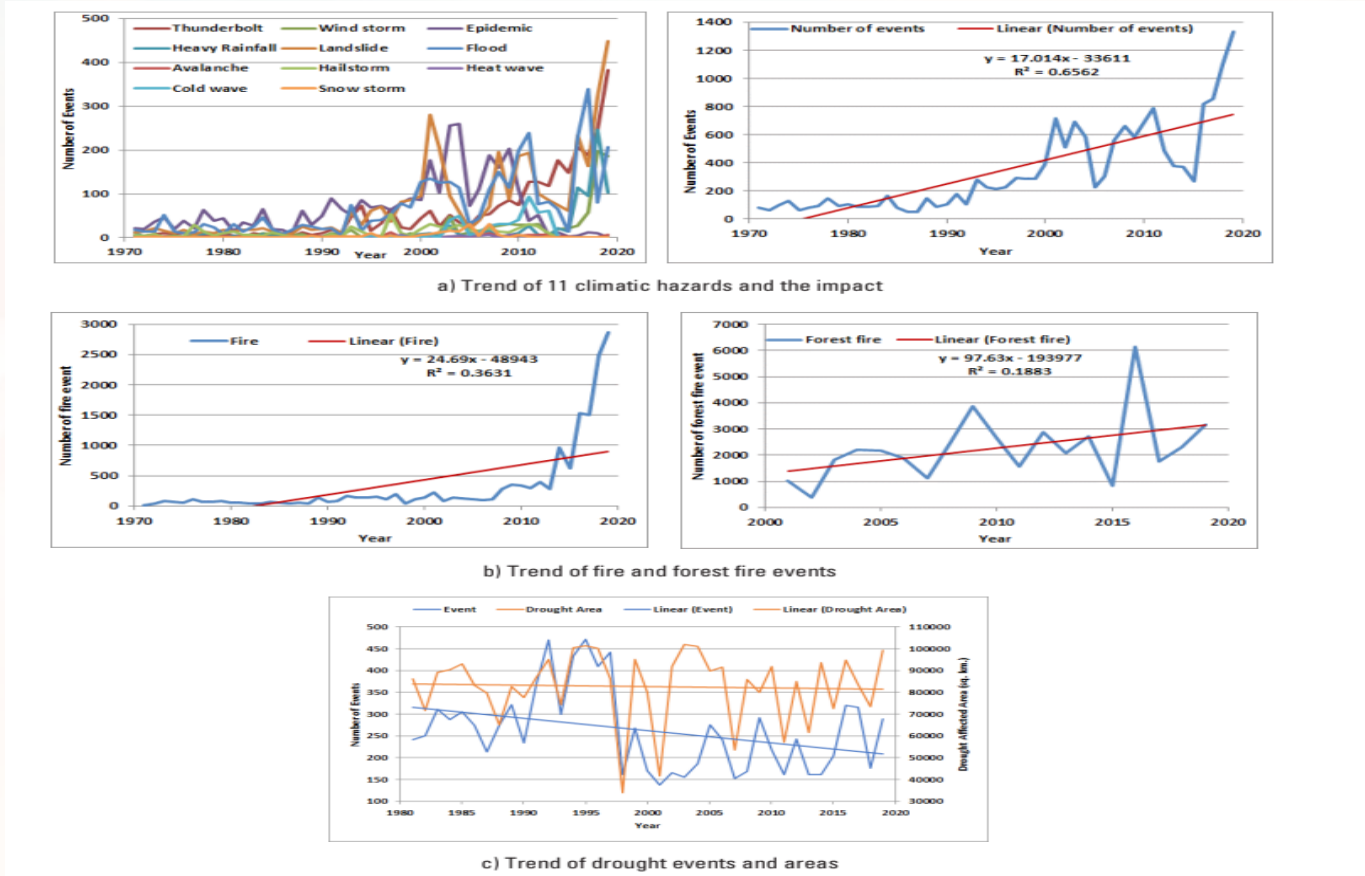
2019	The second review of WIM was conducted during COP 25 in Madrid, Spain, where parties sought to strengthen WIM helping to improve collaboration and coordination inside and outside the convention and to scale up resources, action, and support to developing countries. The Santiago Network to catalyze support to developing countries for L&D was also established.
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**Source:** *The National Framework on Climate-Induced Loss and Damage (October 2021)*

## Understanding the Trends and Patterns of Climate Change Induced Hazards in Nepal:

The increasing frequency of 11 climate-induced hazards including floods, landslides, droughts, hailstorms, thunderbolts, windstorms, heavy rainfall, avalanches, heatwaves, cold waves, snowstorms, fires, forest fires, and epidemics is apparent in Nepal particularly after 1990 (MoFE, 2021). The detail about the trend of the hazards is presented in figure 3 below:

**Figure 3: Trend of the Climate Change Induced Disaster in Nepal**



**Source:** *Vulnerability and Risk Assessment and Identifying Adaptation Options Summary for Policy Makers, MoFE, 2021*

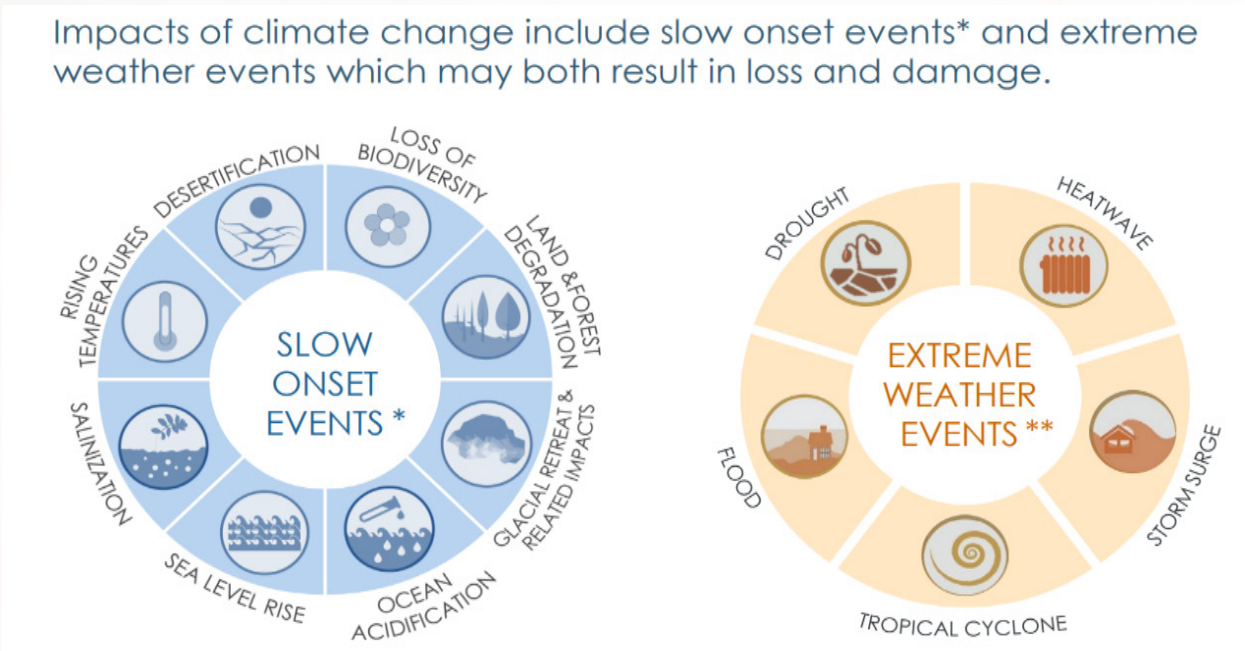
The figure above explains how the various hazards trends are becoming more unprecedented. Among the 11 disasters, 10 show an increasing trend, while drought is on a decreasing trend. Although 56 percent of Nepal's area is affected by drought, 10 of the disasters are statistically significant. Furthermore, fire (including both fires and forest fires) is the most common hazards in Nepal (MoFE, 2021). Irrespective of these data figures, the computation on the vulnerabilities of the most disadvantaged people remains unattempts.

# Understanding of Slow and Long-term Impacts of Climate Change

Although there has been attempts to explain the climate impacts at broader level, the specific details of climate-induced disasters caused loss of lives and properties, forcing individuals and families to migrate due to damaged homes and farmland, and the slow and long-term impacts of climate change in Nepal are erratic. In Nepal Since, the Rising temperatures trigger droughts, while erratic rainfall leads to landslides and floods. The IPCC (2014) noted that the impacts of these incidences are unavoidable

For example, In Karnali Province, over the past three decades, rapid-onset events like erratic rainfall and rising temperatures have led to landslides and flash floods, causing immediate damage to homes and agricultural land, resulting in homelessness and landlessness, as well as waterborne and vector-borne diseases (Roy, 2024). In contrast, slow-onset events like drought reduce agricultural productivity, increase pests and diseases, and may lead to desertification, food insecurity, malnutrition, and mental stress (Roy, 2024). Figure 2 clearly depicts both types of climate change impacts, however, few (e.g. sea level rise, ocean acidifications, etc.) are not relevant in context of Nepal:

**Figure 2: Slow onset events and extreme weather events**



**Source:** Technical paper on non-economic losses, UNFCCC (2012)

## Assessing the Loss and Damage Inequality in National Level

Climate change is significantly contributing to increasing inequities in Nepal. It has been negatively affecting the development process and opportunities for the poor especially those forced to migrate to urban areas due to floods, landslides, heat stress, drought, glacial melt, and other extreme conditions. Women, people with disabilities (PWDs), children, adolescents and elderly people, indigenous peoples, and marginalized communities bear the effect of these impacts, facing disproportionate challenges (Country Climate and Development Report, 2022). Furthermore, the impact has been observed in various forms, resulting in both economic and non-economic losses in Nepal, as clearly presented in Table 2 below:



**Table 2: Disaster incidents and impact (2015–2024) over 10 years**

Year	No. of incidents	Dead	Injured	Affected family	Private stroyed Partial	house de- Complete	Estimated loss (USD)
2015	978	9,304	22,661	10,73,914	299,378	773,936	7,871,579.00
2016	2,370	486	764	13,241	1,222	3,428	23,436,490.00
2017	2,460	490	737	19,073	14,427	1,927	20,806,545.00
2018	3,919	478	2,902	8,180	1,880	2,505	36,182,433.00
2019	4,538	489	2,452	25,264	6,873	4,939	39,245,919.00
2020	3,770	559	1,175	11,314	3,330	1,959	14,676,841.00
2021	4,215	509	1,773	6,583	1,580	2,044	21,190,103.00
2022	3,934	417	983	6,746	2,368	1,952	21,401,089.00
2023	5,856	561	1545	80,267	40,138	28,092	39,113,013.51
2024	8,472	760	1637	18,873	7,696	4,022	22,603,229.17
<b>Total</b>	<b>40,512</b>	<b>14,053</b>	<b>36,629</b>	<b>189,541</b>	<b>378,892</b>	<b>824,804</b>	<b>246,527,242</b>

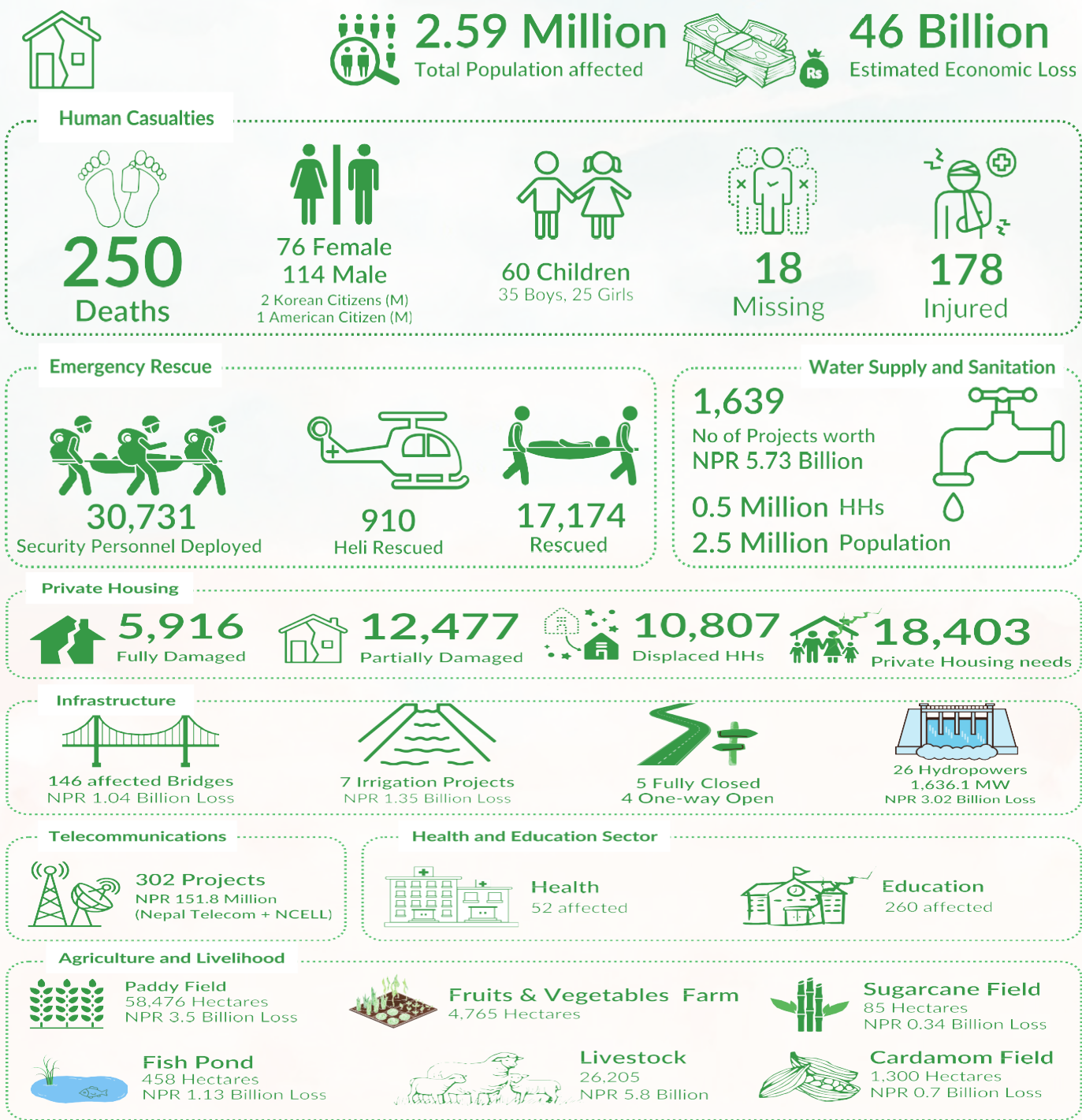
**Source:** DRR portal, bipadportal.gov.np

The above data shows that over the past decade, disaster incidents have steadily increased, with notable spikes in 2023 and 2024, leading to significant economic and non-economic losses. While fatalities and injuries peaked in 2015 due to a major earthquake (not a climate induced disaster), subsequent years continued to see considerable human impact, with recurring disasters affecting thousands of families. Economic losses have been substantial, with the highest financial damages recorded in 2019 and 2023, exceeding \$39 million each year. The destruction of private houses has remained a critical issue, with tens of thousands of homes partially or completely destroyed, exacerbating long-term displacement and economic instability. Additionally, affected families have faced challenges in rebuilding their livelihoods due to asset losses and financial strain. Despite some improvements in disaster preparedness and response, the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters highlight the urgent need for stronger resilience measures, adaptive infrastructure, and enhanced risk mitigation strategies to minimize future economic and structural losses.

On an average, over the past decade, 647 people have died annually in Nepal due to climate-induced disasters. These figure account for approximately 65 percent of total disaster-related deaths, (MoHA, 2018). In terms of economic losses, the highest recorded is NPR. 63,186 million in 2017 during the Tarai floods (NPC, 2017), representing about 2.08 percent of the GDP at current prices for FY 2017/18 (MoFE, 2018).

The floods and landslides in September 2024, reported 250 deaths, including 40.4 percent females, 59.6 percent males, and 24 percent children. Among these, one-fourth of the total deaths were children. Additionally, 18 individuals were reported missing, 178 were injured, and 17,174 individuals were rescued (NDRRMA, 2024). Similarly, 10,807 households were displaced. The government declared 71 municipalities across 20 districts as disaster crisis zones, highlighting the widespread impact, which includes both economic and non-economic losses and damages. These losses encompass human lives, health facilities, water supply systems, private and public housing, infrastructure such as bridges, irrigation systems, hydropower plants, roads, public buildings, as well as agricultural lands and structures (NDRRMA, 2024). The details are provided in figure 4 below:

Figure 4: Summary of loss and damage from the floods and landslides in September 2024



Source: 2024 September Floods and Landslides (NDRRMA, 2024)

However, comprehensive disaggregated data, including caste, gender, disability, geographic locality, economic status, and age, do not exist, and this is a significant problem. Such data are essential for accurately portraying non-economic losses such as cultural erosion, health deterioration, and overall well-being. These insights will be instrumental in formulating evidence-based policies, plans, and programs aimed at effectively mitigating inequalities exacerbated by climate change-induced disasters.



## Assessing the Loss and Damage in Sub –national Level

Though numerous studies, assessments, reports, and databases on climate change-induced loss and disasters are available, presenting various information and updates, several notable gaps remain in the context of Nepal. The ability to attribute impacts to specific weather events remains largely undeveloped, except in the case of glacier melting and its consequences. Further, there is no globally accepted approach for assessing climate change-induced loss and damage (L&D) and lack of systematic data on both economic and non-economic loss and damage. These gaps contribute to ongoing disputes in global negotiations, where legal and political complexities make loss and damage a significant challenge for supporting developing countries like Nepal. The alarming loss and damage figures across the different provinces in Nepal provide evidence for further strengthening the sub national level integrated database for systematic interventions across the provinces.

The total estimated financial loss across the provinces amounted to NPR. 4,580,710,50. Among them, Koshi Province recorded the highest loss at NPR 434,729,050, followed by Gandaki with NPR 15,360,000. Bagmati Province's estimated loss was NPR 4,062,000, while other provinces reported comparatively lower figures (NDRRMA, 2024). Further, a total of 238 deaths were reported across the provinces, with Bagmati recording the highest fatalities at 208, followed by Koshi with 20 deaths. Additionally, 18 people were reported missing, 14 of whom were from Bagmati and 4 from Koshi. A total of 170 individuals were injured, with Bagmati and Koshi provinces again accounting for the majority of the injuries 154 and 13, respectively (NDRRMA, 2024). The detail is given in the table 3 below: *\*though the report does not include data from Sudurpaschim Province.*

**Table 3: Province wise status of loss from floods and landslide in September 2024**

Province	Number of incidents	People death	People missing	People injured	House destroyed	House affected	Livestock destroyed	Total Estimated Loss in NPR.
Koshi	121	20	4	13	117	111	61	434729050
Bagmati	161	208	14	154	424	743	1,205	4062000
Madhesh	15	8	0	1	3	1	0	350000
Lumbini	11	2	0	2	2	0	2	3150000
Gandaki	5	0	0	0	5	0	14	15360000
Karnali	3	0	0	0	0	0	6	420000
Grand Total	316	238	18	170	551	855	1,288	45,80,71,050

**Source:** A Preliminary Loss and Damage Assessment of Flood and Landslide September 2024

On top of that, in Karnali Province, economic losses from climate-induced disasters such as landslides, floods, droughts, erratic rainfall, forest fires, and crop and livestock diseases have been substantial. In Planta rural municipality (RM), major disasters: landslides, floods, and erratic rainfall caused significant economic loss, amounting to NPR 40 million (USD 300,000). Landslides and floods buried farmland, destroyed homes, and displaced families, while erratic rainfall eroded topsoil, damaging agriculture and biodiversity. Additionally, crop and livestock diseases, with losses amounting to NPR 4.3 million, reduced yields and increased costs for local farmers (Roy, 2024).

Similarly, in Chaukune RM, landslides caused the financial losses, totalling NPR 13.7 million (USD 97,000), as they buried agricultural land, destroyed homes, and left many families traumatized.

Erratic rainfall (NPR. 2.2 million) worsened the situation by washing away fertile topsoil and damaging food supplies, while floods (NPR. 455,000) eroded valuable farmland. In total, disasters in Chaulkune RM led to an estimated loss of NPR. 16.4 million (Roy, 2024). The losses across Palanta and Chaulkune RM are representative case only which underscore the urgent need for disaster preparedness and resilient infrastructure to mitigate future risks. Strengthening resilience in both municipalities is crucial to reduce vulnerability and safeguard livelihoods from future climate-induced events.

## **Estimating Economic Loss: Sectoral Analysis**

The development gains are at risk in Nepal due to climate change impacting multiple sectors and livelihoods in Nepal (GoN, 2021). The shocks and stress arising from the effects of climate change are putting the already poor, marginalized and vulnerable population to further life risk. The socio-economic status, social security, affordability, employment, access to basic services, public and private assets, and other life attributions are also either exposed to or put at risk. The degree of such risk depends on the degree of a vulnerability based on the various dimensions such as economic status, education, gender, geographic locations, and living environment of these populations.

Study and Review, CCA interventions and Research in Nepal to Plan Future Investments in adaptation across the vital economic sectors inform that climate-induced disasters killed more than 4,000 people and caused financial losses of US\$ 5.34 billion from 2000 through 2010 in Nepal. The same report cites various references that inform that due to climate variability and extreme weather events, Nepal is estimated to lose about 2 percent of GDP per year. By 2050, the cost is estimated to increase to 2- 3 percent of GDP, equivalent to about 62.384 billion (IDS- Nepal, PAC and GCAP 2014). Climate change also poses a real threat to food and water security in many countries, including Nepal. The Economic Impact Assessment of Climate Change in Key Sectors (2013) has estimated the current climate variability. It indicates a likely loss of 1.5 to 2 percent of current GDP (approximately \$ 270 to 360 million a year) and much higher in extreme years in the country.

The sectoral Climate change impacts on agriculture, food security, forest and biodiversity, water, energy, human health, tourism, habitation, and infrastructure development are much more evident. Efforts made through a scientific assessment of climate risks, potential effects, and impacts in different scenarios through climate risk modelling and vulnerability. Although, they provide predictions on likely climate change impacts that would affect the country, the exact loss due to climate change affecting the most poor and vulnerable groups by sector are not recorded.

The sectoral data below summarizes research findings on the financial implications of climate and disaster risks across various sectors in the country, highlighting their potential to further impact the lives of the most vulnerable groups:

### **Food Productivity will decline in the country**

- Rice production is estimated to decrease by 10 percent in Terai by 2070 (MoFE, 2021 as cited in MoSTE 2014)
- Reduction in rice production by 30 percent due to heavy flooding in the mid-western and far- western in 2006 and 2008 (FAO, 2016)



- The period of 1971 to 2007 was reported to have more than 150 drought events in Nepal, affecting about 330 thousand hectares of agricultural land (MoFE, 2021 as cited in UNDP, 2009)
- There will be a decrease of about 1.6 percent decline in rice production and a 15.5 percent decrease in wheat yield by 2020 (MoPE, 2016) and Food grain production estimated to decrease by 5.3 percent.
- A shift in agro-ecological zones, prolonged dry spells, higher incidences of pests and diseases
- The effect of temperature rise is also affecting the loss of farm productivity in the country (Joshi, Ghimire, Kharel, Mishra, and Clay, 2021), altering the timing of the agriculture crop production cycle (Paudel, 2014).

### **Water vulnerability will affect the availability of water resources, impact energy generation potentiality and increase snowmelt**

- Hydro-power generation will be impacted by an increase in the frequency of disasters that result in sedimentation and geo-hazards. Further, Likely changes in quantity and quality of water due to changes in the frequency of floods, drought, and seasonal timing of water also observed. (MoFE, 2021)
- Melting of glaciers, formation of glacial lakes in the mountain valleys and expansion of existing glacial lakes will increase (WECS, 2011)
- Electricity Generation could reduce up to 30 percent of the total installed capacity of hydropower plants (NEA, 2013), extreme weather conditions could also affect the transfer, and transmission of electricity due to climate-induced disasters like landslides, and floods (MoFE, 2021).

### **Forest and Bio-diversity will be affected negatively in high mountains, mid-hills and lowlands**

- There will be an increase in incidences of forest fire and approximately 89 percent of forest fires occur during the dry months of March, April, and May, with most being human induced (Matin et al., 2017).
- Shifts in agroecological zones with likely decline in NTFP productivity, increase in invasion by alien species, depletion of rangeland, loss of wetlands, change in woody biomass, grasslands, abandonment of managed lands. (Singh, Khadka, Wijanayaka, and Mombauer, 2019).
- Depletion of wetland and mountain plants will be affected by overall warming due to changes in precipitation pattern.
- Medicinal plants in higher mountains become vulnerable and decrease in production quantity. And Changes in fruiting and flowering of plants affect the survival of wildlife (MoFE, 2021).

### **Geographic Expansion of vector-borne diseases will increase**

- Specific incidences related to dengue vectors' presence are reported in Nepal's high mountains (Dhimal, Kuch, Ahrens, and et.al, 2015).

- A study following Representative Concentration Pathways (RCP 2.6, RCP 6.0, and RCP 8.5) predicts geographic expansion of dengue virus infection hotspots shifting to higher elevation regions by 2050–2070 (Acharya, 2018)
- Likely increase in diarrheal cases among the residents of the mountain region of Nepal compared to low land (Dhimal, et al., 2016).
- Climate change has caused health risks that affect men and women differently in both the highland and lowland regions of Nepal (Dhimal M. L., 2018).
- Triggering effects of vector-borne and water-borne diseases, diarrhoeal diseases, including cholera, malnutrition, cardiovascular diseases, psychological stress, and injuries (Dhimal and Bhusal, 2009).

### **Tourism, Natural and Cultural Heritage (TNCH) will suffer**

- Climate change affects the tourism infrastructure and flow of tourists in the country, affecting the country's GDP
- The present glaciated area above 5000 m is likely to lose 60-70 percent of snow cover with an increase of 3-4°C in the Himalaya (Alam and Regmi, 2004), affecting mountaineering revenues directly.
- Trekking and rafting are other businesses that are likely to be directly affected by climate change in tourism. An estimated loss of tourism income increased from NPR. 0.0778 billion (1985-1990) to NPR. 1.4624 billion in 2010-2015 and is likely to increase such loss due to climate change (PracticalAction, 2018).

## **Faces of Inequality: Assessing Disproportionate Impacts**

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Disasters have diverse impacts on different social groups. Those who are highly susceptible to disasters include women, children, elderly citizens, people with disabilities, and marginalized communities (MTR Sendai Framework, 2015-2030).

### **Gender: Women and Girls**

Women in Nepal make up about 73 percent of the agricultural workforce and the sector is feminized due to male outmigration. Women farmers are more vulnerable because of their limited access to agricultural inputs, extension services, training, and financing (Country Climate and Development Report 2022).

More than 90 percent of women in Karnali Province were found directly impacted by the disasters that occurred in 2022 (Roy, 2024). Their vulnerability is caused by traditional roles such as childcare, eldercare, cooking, and other domestic responsibilities. The situation worsens when husbands or economically active family members migrate to another regions and countries (mostly in India) for employment, leaving women and girls to manage additional responsibilities alone. Limited alternative employment options, combined with the loss of homes and agricultural land, further strain women as they strive to support their families. This burden contributes to deteriorating mental health, security threats, economic hardship, and diminishing social recognition, and which hinder their ability to rebuild their homes and livelihoods (Roy, 2024).



## **Age: Children, Youth, Adolescents and Senior Citizens**

24 percent children were lost their lives due to the floods and landslides in September 2024 caused among 250 deaths (NDRRMA, 2024). This is almost one third of the total death which indicates that the huge numbers of children are affected due to the climate change induced disasters as they are highly vulnerable and need support to save their lives in such cases. Particularly children, adolescents, and the elderly, exacerbating health risks and economic burdens. According to UNICEF, nearly 1 billion children are at “extremely high risk” due to climate-related hazards, including floods, heatwaves, and air pollution in the world. In Nepal, the elderly are also particularly vulnerable to extreme heat events and respiratory illnesses from worsening air pollution, with studies indicating that heat-related mortality rates among older adults continue to rise globally (WHO, 2024). Furthermore, the long-term economic loss from such disasters remains inadequately documented, particularly in terms of non-economic damages, such as mental health impacts on children and adolescents and displacement effects on aging populations. Addressing these challenges requires targeted policies that integrate age-specific health interventions and enhance systematic data collection to ensure effective adaptation strategies.

## **Persons With Disabilities (PWDs)**

In Nepal, persons with disabilities (PWDs) have been facing heightened vulnerabilities to climate change-induced disasters due to pre-existing social, economic, and infrastructural challenges. PWDs often lack access to early warning systems tailored to their needs, limiting their ability to respond effectively to imminent hazards (M'Vouama et al., 2023). Additionally, inaccessible infrastructure hampers evacuation efforts, increasing the risk of injury or death during disasters. Additionally, post-disaster recovery remains challenging, as relief efforts often fail to address their specific needs, including accessible shelters, assistive devices, and healthcare services (UNICEF, 2021).

## **Dalit, Indigenous and Marginalized Communities**

Dalit, indigenous people, and other marginalized communities in Nepal are disproportionately affected by climate change due to deep-rooted inequality, marginalization, livelihoods that are highly dependent on natural resources, and locational factors from often living in remote and vulnerable geographies. Further, indigenous people often do not have occupational security and control over land and other natural resources on which they depend. Agricultural practices that draw on indigenous and local knowledge can contribute to addressing climate challenges in a sustainable way while contributing to food security, biodiversity conservation, and resilience (Country Climate and Development Report, 2022).

## **Poor/ultra-poor**

In Nepal, the poor and ultra-poor populations are excessively affected by climate change-induced disasters, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and deepening poverty (Consultation Workshop, Jan 2025). These communities often lack access to resources and infrastructure, making them more susceptible to the adverse effects of climate change. For instance, a study by Mott MacDonald (2022) highlights that climate change impacts, such as severe floods and droughts, have led to significant crop losses, directly affecting the livelihoods of the poorest households. Similarly, research on Environmental Management indicates that communities in Nepal especially in middle hills, particularly those in lower well-being groups, experience higher exposure and sensitivity to climate change impacts, coupled with limited adaptive capacity (Joshi and Joshi, 2014). These



observations highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to build resilience among the poor and ultra-poor populations of Nepal, ensuring they have the resources and support necessary to cope with climate-induced disaster loss and damage.

## **Remote Topography and Undeveloped Area**

Climate change impacts in Nepal vary by region. The southern regions face heat stress and flooding, while the northern areas are prone to landslides, water stress, and glacial lake overflow. Southern municipalities, with better access to credit and support networks, show higher resilience, particularly in agriculture. In contrast, the North has limited coping mechanisms and requires targeted support for weather shocks and water access issues. Additionally, there is a need for improved contingency planning and climate-sensitive healthcare infrastructure (Country Climate and Development Report, 2022).

## **Rural and Urban Settlements**

The direct consequences of climate change include loss of lives, property damage, and increased economic burdens, primarily affecting housing and shelters, human cultures and livelihoods, and public and physical infrastructures such as water, health, education, communication, industry, roads, transportation, hydropower, protection, and entertainment (MoFE, 2021). These impacts are driven by floods, landslides, droughts, epidemics, heatwaves, cold waves, and fires. Most urban settlements in the Terai are prone to flooding after intense rainfall due to inadequate drainage systems. In both rural and urban areas of the Terai, more than 92 percent of slum houses are temporary (UN, 2013, as cited in MoFE, 2021). Additionally, most households exposed to flooding are in Terai areas where population densities are comparatively higher. With increasing urbanization, the situation has worsened. A higher incidence of respiratory diseases is reported in urban areas compared to rural areas, leading to negative health outcomes and economic burdens for the population (CBS, 2017, as cited in MoFE, 2021). Moreover, the impact of climate-induced disasters is generally more severe for children, women, the elderly, expectant mothers, people with chronic health problems, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and disadvantaged populations (MoFE, 2021).

# **Policy Response: Discussion and Analysis**

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Several policies have been formulated at the global, national, and local levels to create an enabling environment for addressing climate change induced loss and damage. However, these policy frameworks appear inadequate in addressing the widening poverty gaps and inequalities among people, regions, and communities.

## **International Policies**

Nepal is a signatory to UNFCCC and has participated in key negotiations related to climate adaptation and loss and damage. It also provided the foundation for addressing loss and damage caused by climate change. However, loss and damage were not explicitly recognized as a separate pillar in the early stages of the UNFCCC. The Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM), established at COP19 (2013), addresses climate-induced loss and damage, focusing on finance, insurance, and risk reduction. While WIM provides a broad framework, it falls short in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable communities, including women, children, Dalits, the ultra-poor, remote populations, and ethnic minorities.

**The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) 2015–2030:** While, it emphasizes on the need to integrate climate change adaptation (CCA) with disaster risk reduction (DRR) to build resilience at all levels and calls for risk-informed development, promoting climate-resilient infrastructure, sustainable land use, and early warning systems to minimize vulnerabilities<sup>1</sup>, it lacks a clear Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) dimensions, particularly on how to address the impacts on the most vulnerable groups that is further widening the social and economic inequalities. The broader perspective to reduce disaster risks and losses of lives, livelihoods, health, and economic, physical, social, cultural, and environmental assets for individuals, businesses, and communities by 2030 (UN, 2015), seems inadequate to precisely address the most vulnerable groups in the Nepal's context.

**Paris Agreement Rule Book:** It provides a very strong basis to align the country's goal to climate change adaptation measures highlighting the need to periodically update Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and provide an update on the implementation status of NDCs in the national context in the public registry maintained by the UNFCCC secretariat. The countries are required to account for their transparency report on greenhouse gas (GHG) corresponding to NDCs regularly. However, this rule book also lacks provisions for integrating GESI into disaster and climate issues.

**The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),** particularly Goal 13: Climate Action, calls for addressing climate change-induced loss and damage by emphasizing the need for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. SDG 13: Climate Action urges urgent measures to combat climate change, including loss and damage. Target 13.3 emphasizes education and capacity-building, while Target 13.a focuses on financial support under the Paris Agreement. Target 13.2 calls for integrating climate measures into national policies to enhance resilience. However, national efforts often lack provisions for compensation, highlighting the need for adaptation, resilience-building, and financial support.

## National Policies

Nepal has developed various national policies and frameworks in creating an enabling environment to address the issues and challenges emerging from climate change-induced loss and damage. While some of these policies directly address loss and damage, others have an indirect correlation, focusing on climate resilience, financial support, and disaster risk reduction. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) provides the foundation for disaster governance, recognizing disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) as a shared responsibility among federal, provincial, and local governments. It grants local governments significant authority to manage DRR independently while allowing provincial and federal governments to provide coordination, policy guidance, and necessary support.

Aligned with this constitutional mandate, Nepal has devised a supportive policy framework for climate action, reinforcing its commitment to the Paris Agreement. Below are the key national policies and strategies addressing loss and damage in Nepal:

- **National Framework on Climate-Induced Loss and Damage (October 2021):** guides Nepal's approach to assessing, managing, and integrating loss and damage into national policies. It emphasizes financial mechanisms, institutional resilience, research, and multi-stakeholder engagement while ensuring effective monitoring and implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030



- **The National Climate Change Policy, 2019:** provides a comprehensive framework for climate action in Nepal, addressing adaptation, mitigation, and *Loss and Damage (L&D)*. It emphasizes strengthening disaster risk reduction, enhancing resilience in vulnerable communities, and integrating L&D into national planning. The policy also focuses on mobilizing climate finance, promoting research and technology transfer, and ensuring institutional coordination to minimize and address climate-induced losses.
- **The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act, 2017:** establishes the National Council for Disaster Risk Reduction, led by the Prime Minister, to formulate policies and plans. It also creates the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) to coordinate multi-hazard risk assessment, communication, and disaster reduction efforts with stakeholders.
- **The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) 2021-2050:** It incorporates *Loss and Damage (L&D)* by recognizing the increasing risks posed by climate change and the need for systematic responses. It emphasizes integrating L&D into national policies, strengthening institutional mechanisms, and enhancing financial and technical support to address climate-induced losses, particularly for vulnerable communities. NAP outlines long-term adaptation priorities, integrating L&D to strengthen resilience in vulnerable communities. It also highlights the importance of early warning systems, disaster preparedness, and resilience-building to minimize irreversible climate impacts.

Beyond policy documents, Nepal has other frameworks to address loss and damage. National Adaptation Plan for Action (NAPA) identifies urgent adaptation needs, including disaster risk management. The National Environment Policy 2076 emphasizes resilience and ecosystem protection. The Environmental Protection Act (1997) safeguards natural resources, indirectly aiding L&D mitigation. The Agriculture Development Strategy (2015-2035) promotes climate-smart agriculture for food security and risk reduction. However, these plans often lack the necessary resources and funding to be implemented effectively (Roy, 2024). Additionally, there is a need for more coordination between different levels of government and between government agencies and civil society organizations in order to ensure that adaptation efforts are comprehensive and effective. Despite these efforts, Nepal remains highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, with losses and damages already being felt across the country. Policy gaps hinder Nepal's ability to effectively address climate change loss and damage.

## Local Policies

The National Framework on Local Adaptation Plans for Action (LAPA), 2019, serves as a key guiding policy for local governments in addressing climate change and its impacts, particularly concerning loss and damage. As of 2024, over 700 Local Adaptation Plans of Action (LAPAs) and 2,500 Community Adaptation Plans of Action (CAPAs) have been developed across various municipalities and rural municipalities (Upreti 2024). These plans aim to enhance community resilience by focusing on climate-smart agriculture, early warning systems, and emergency response mechanisms (Upreti 2024). However, the implementation status of these plans remains uncertain due to a lack of clear assessments and updated data. There is a need for more comprehensive data on the exact number of local governments that have fully implemented these policies. Strengthening financial support, capacity-building, and coordination between local and national governments is crucial to bridging this gap and ensuring that vulnerable communities receive the protection and support (Upreti, 2024).



In addition to LAPAs, the Local Disaster and Climate Resilience Plan (LDCRP) has been introduced to better understand climate change-induced loss and damage, combining both disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) measures, thus providing a more holistic approach to building climate resilience at the local level. Through this plan, local governments aim to identify disaster-prone areas, implement early warning systems, strengthen emergency response capabilities, and focus on enhancing resilience in vulnerable communities, ensuring that both climate adaptation and disaster preparedness are synchronized (UNDP, 2020).

Although the global, national and local policy frameworks strongly emphasize the need to address vulnerabilities, they do not clearly explain how inequality is widening due to climate-induced disaster loss and damage.

## Conclusion

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Understanding climate change-induced loss and damage requires analysis from both global and national and local perspectives. This report explored key determinants of loss and damage in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable groups while making an effort to meet the national and international commitments on climate change issues.

This study informed that while various policies, institutional and governance mechanism acknowledge climate vulnerability issues and challenges, but they lack clear provisions to effectively address the needs of marginalized populations, communities, that face disproportionate impacts of climate change induced disasters. Additionally, a significant gap in data and information, particularly regarding the impacts on segregated groups of people, e.g. women, Dalit, adolescents, children, elderly, ultra poor, and regions makes it difficult to address their specific needs. The absence of a specialized framework to address climate change-induced inequalities further exacerbates these challenges.

It is expected that adopting a more localized framework that considers the impacts of climate change in Nepal, particularly on marginalized communities, women, Dalits, and rural populations dependent on agriculture will help improve the understanding and database on loss and damage in the country's context. Furthermore, developing a pro-poor and equitable climate friendly framework could also contribute to understanding non-economic losses beyond financial impacts, such as cultural heritage and ecosystems and guide and strengthen advocacy strategies at national and international forums, helping secure resources to enhance.

In a nutshell, Nepal must prioritize efforts to develop a localized understanding of loss and damage, establish a database system to track slow-onset and long-term climate change induced disasters trends and their impact on different people and places, and document both economic and non-economic losses. Additionally, recording social and cultural impacts will be crucial in helping vulnerable groups to build climate resilience. By adopting equity-focused, context-specific solutions, Nepal is likely to fostering a more resilient and inclusive future for all communities.

## Recommendations

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Based on the findings and analysis of the available information and data, the following key recommendations are deemed significant:

- **Understanding loss and damage:** Developing clear and simplified definitions of loss and damage at the local level, along with an effective framework for assessment, is essential for community understanding. Empowering local governments to integrate L&D measures into planning, bridging global policies and local realities, especially in rural areas is also important.
- **Develop a system based integrated approach to reduce climate induced inequality:** Government of Nepal should develop a clear, structured framework with specific process indicators to identify and explain the growing inequality caused by climate change-induced disaster loss and damage. In addition, the government should prioritize grant-based climate finance over debt instruments, particularly considering that Nepal receives a significant portion of its climate finance i.e. 58 percent of the total from Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), of which 98 percent is in the form of debt. Relying heavily on loans to address climate impacts may further strain the country's fiscal capacity, thereby exacerbating existing inequalities and disparities.
- **Integrate GESI concerns into climate policies:** It is essential to recognise a need for an inclusive policy and guidelines for integrating Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) into sectoral policies, plans, and programs. This means recognising unique vulnerabilities and contributions of the marginalized groups such as women, indigenous communities and people with disabilities for their representation, in climate change decision-making and building their capacities to enhance their knowledge, skills on climate risks and sustainable technologies.
- **Data management:** Given that climate change disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, it is crucial to assess the non-economic losses together with economic loss data to better understand vulnerable groups specific loss and damages. These databases could reflect the brunt of climate-induced disasters, which exacerbates existing inequalities of the vulnerable groups, including women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.
- **Manage and advocate for dedicated fund:** Nepal should secure dedicated funding to compensate for loss and damage caused by climate change-induced disasters. This requires both establishing sustainable financing mechanisms for long-term resilience and advocating for dedicated funding streams under global frameworks such as UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR). Ensuring equitable distribution of these funds and promoting localized implementation of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) will help vulnerable communities in Nepal access climate insurance and financial support. Policy reforms can further enhance the enabling environment for effectively addressing loss and damage.

- **Strengthening coordination and collaboration:** Enhancing coordination among different levels of government and civil society organizations and international communities is essential for integrating risk reduction strategies into national and local plans. This will help minimize losses and damages, enhance community resilience, and align adaptation efforts with Nepal's climate targets and foster ambitious actions for climate justice, ensuring a sustainable future for all of humanity.
- **Localization of loss and damage discourse:** Provincial and local level government must take proactive steps at the local level, where climate impacts are most severe, by localizing the Loss and Damage (L&D) inclusive discourse and strengthening local-global linkages through a climate justice approach. This involves empowering local communities to voice their challenges, integrating their perspectives into national and international climate policies, and ensuring that financial and technical support reaches those most affected.





# Inequality in Education

-Rupa Munakarmi, PhD

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# Introduction

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Education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental human right (Madani, 2019) with a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion and economic growth. It is important for equality as it provides knowledge, skills, and chances to improve their lives and communities. Education is also perceived as a way to reduce social and economic gaps and promote equality (Ilieand Rose, 2016; UNESCO, 2020). In line with this, Nepal has expressed its international commitments aimed at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Despite of these commitments, inequalities continue to exist in Nepal in the form of accessibility, inequalities in quality, and disparities in educational outcomes. Such inequalities are typically related to and influenced by socio-economic status, geographical location, gender identity, ethnic background, and the presence of disabilities (Mishra and Pettalla, 2023).

When we consider human capital approach, it argues that investment in education ultimately leads to economic development on a broader scale as well as increased individual well-being and personal development (Burgess, 2016). Alternatively, critical pedagogy approach sees this issue differently by highlighting how existing power relations within educational institutions function to perpetuate and maintain social stratification and inequalities between different groups (McLaren, 2023). Additionally, the capabilities approach, by Amartya Sen, emphasizes the significant role played by education not just in promoting knowledge but also in expanding the freedoms and opportunities available to individuals, thereby enhancing their overall quality of life (Dang, 2014). In practice, these theoretical models intersect with systemic problems, such as undermanaged and underfunded public schools, lack of qualified teachers, language barriers, and discriminatory policies that disproportionately affect marginalized groups. Hence this shows that even though education offers chances, wealthier and privileged students benefit with better access and resources, while disadvantages and marginalized groups face barriers like poverty, language problem, culturally non-responsive pedagogy, and discrimination. The stark contrast between private and public schooling has created a dual education system, where access to quality education is largely determined by socio-economic status.

Ever since the armed insurgency between Maoist and Nepal government ended in 2006, Nepal has witnessed a chain of reforms in its education system. The Nepalese education system has witnessed remarkable progress in the form of improved literacy rates and improved school attendance (MOEST, 2021, 2024). But the irony is that the Constitution of Nepal (2015) is yet to be materialized in the ground as it says education is a fundamental right and a tool for reducing poverty and discrimination, many children especially those from marginalized and underprivileged communities continue to face significant obstacles in accessing quality education (Mathema, 2007). These disparities are the result of an interaction of social, economic, and policy-related variables that are embedded. The prevalence of deep-rooted caste hierarchies and pervasive gender discrimination severely limits the ability of marginalized communities to take advantage of schooling opportunities (Pherali, 2011). Furthermore, the implementation of neo-liberal policies has been accountable for exacerbating these issues by promoting privatization, which disproportionately benefits wealthier families while sidelining those with fewer resources (Devkota and Upadhyay, 2016). It shows that when comparing urban settings to rural ones, the availability of resources and educational facilities remains limited in rural areas (Panthheand McCutchen, 2015). Different reports have been issued by prominent organizations such as the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, and UNESCO in 2016, revealing persistent inequality and recurring gaps in access to education.



Additionally, the Global Human Development Report (2024) by UNDP highlights Nepal's broader educational inequalities in a global context. Nepal ranked 146th in the Human Development Index (HDI) with an HDI value of 0.601, showing improvement from 149th place in 2021. However, gender inequalities persist, with female HDI at 0.562 compared to male HDI at 0.635, resulting in a gender development index value of 0.885. Despite progress in life expectancy and schooling years since 1990, these indicators reflect ongoing inequalities in access to education and opportunities for marginalized groups.

The rationale of this study rests in the imperative and urgent need to respond appropriately to the chronic and long-standing education inequalities that continue to hinder realization of both individual potential and societal progress. Education inequality not only restricts opportunities for members of the most disadvantaged groups; it also reinforces and perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion that bear down on communities overall. It is observed in Nepal, as there are deeply rooted regional inequities in access to education, with gender inequalities, socio-economic constraints, and systemic inefficiencies that collectively show major challenges to the realization of an equitable education system for all citizens on an equal basis.

This study report is prepared to present a detailed analysis that explores the factors underlying the extensive inequalities prevalent in the field of education. The report offers an in-depth analysis of the existing policies, intervention strategies, and literature. Hence, it aims to decrease relevant gaps that exist in the educational system and offer recommendations that can support in the formulation of an inclusive and equitable system of education regardless of their situation or background.

## **Global Concern on Education Inequality**

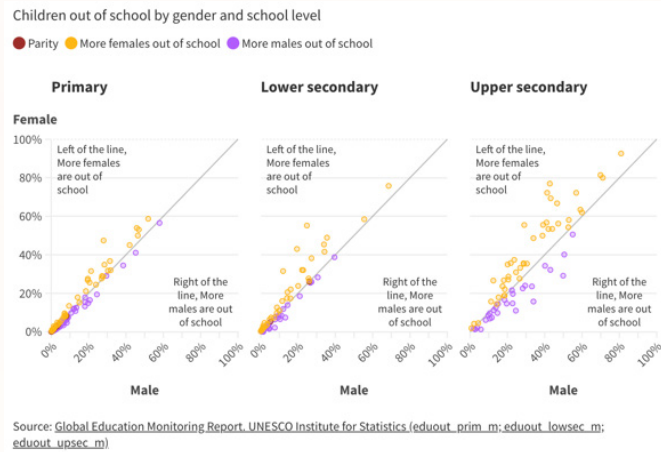
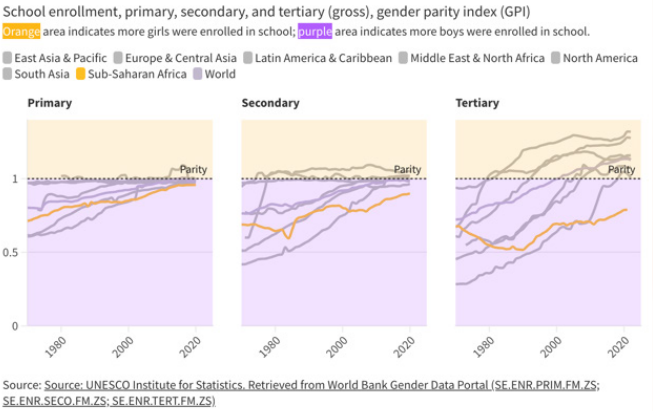
Education is often regarded as a fundamental human right, yet access to quality education remains highly unequal across the world. The inequalities in educational opportunities are evident, and it is a worldwide issue of concern that troubles the globe. The systemic inequalities rooted in economic conditions, social structures, and historical legacies continue to create barriers for marginalized communities particularly in the global south. The United Nations and international agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank have long recognized education as a key driver of sustainable development, prompting global commitments to address these inequalities. Various policy frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), provide a global agenda for narrowing education inequalities. The Education for All (EFA) initiative, spearheaded by UNESCO, aimed to provide universal primary education and improve learning outcomes globally. Additionally, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focused on achieving universal primary education, but faced challenges in delivering equity and quality education for all (UNESCO, 2015). More recently, global frameworks like the Incheon Declaration (2015) emphasize inclusive and equitable education for all (UNESCO, 2016). However, persistent structural and systemic challenges in the form of economic disparities, political instability, and socio-cultural norms continue to hinder progress (UNESCO, 2021).

One of the major milestones in the global movement toward inclusive education was the adoption of the Salamanca Declaration in 1994. The declaration reaffirmed the principle that every child, regardless of ability or background, has the right to education in mainstream schools (UNESCO, 1994). It emphasized that inclusive schools are the most effective means of combating inequality, promoting social inclusion, and improving education quality and cost-effectiveness. This principle

was later reinforced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008), which explicitly called for a transformation in educational culture, policy, and practice to accommodate diverse student needs (General Comment No. 4). Despite these commitments, however, millions of children worldwide remain excluded from mainstream education due to poverty, conflict, gender discrimination, and inadequate infrastructure (Sign, 2024).

In 2019, UNESCO and the Ministry of Education of Colombia co-organized an international forum marking the 25th anniversary of the Salamanca Declaration. Under the theme “Every Learner Matters,” the forum reaffirmed the importance of equity and inclusion in education, advocating for broader policies to strengthen access to quality learning opportunities (Opertti, Walker, and Zhang, 2014). It highlighted that meaningful inclusion requires addressing the systemic barriers that marginalize certain groups. Ultimately, as UNESCO (2016) also noted in the Incheon Declaration (2015), inclusive education must be seen as a strategy for improving education systems overall, ensuring they serve the needs of all learners rather than expecting students to fit into rigid structures. The declaration also highlighted how political instability, insufficient funding, and socio-cultural biases continue to hinder progress, particularly in low-income countries.

Education inequality is also shaped by broader economic and political forces. Children in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) attend 2.8 fewer years of school than the global average and 6.4 years less than those in OECD countries (UNDP, 2024). In many parts of the Global South, the legacy of colonial education systems and the influence of neoliberal policies have exacerbated inequalities rather than reducing them. Structural adjustment programs and market-driven education reforms have often prioritized private schooling and standardized assessments at the expense of equitable public education. Tikly and Barrett (2011) have argued that these policies disproportionately affect marginalized communities, further widening the educational divide between privileged and underprivileged groups. Addressing these systemic inequalities requires a fundamental shift in how education is financed and governed at both national and international levels.



has worsened due to COVID-19. In many countries, inclusive education policies are lacking, with only about a quarter of nations in the region having laws that support inclusive education policies (UNESCO, 2020).



Despite these challenges, global advocacy efforts continue to push for more inclusive education systems. International forums and policy discussions emphasize the importance of education as a tool for social justice, economic mobility, and sustainable development. While progress has been made in increasing access to education, much remains to be done to ensure that all learners regardless of their socio-economic background, gender, or disability status can fully participate in and benefit from quality education.

## State of Education Inequality in Nepal

Education inequality in Nepal can be examined through two major dimensions: inequality in Access and inequality in Quality. Both dimensions contribute to the persistent gaps in learning opportunities, particularly affecting marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Both of these dimensions are interrelated, with each influencing the other and contributing to the persistent gaps in learning opportunities, especially for marginalized and disadvantaged. communities. So, while talking about access, the quality in education also come consequently.

### Inequality in Access

Despite constitutional guarantees of education as a fundamental right, many children in Nepal face significant barriers to accessing education due to economic, social, and structural factors. Nepal has made significant progress in school enrollment, but inequalities in access remain, especially at the secondary level. The gross enrollment ratio (GER) for basic education (Grades 1-8) has surpassed 100 percent, indicating high participation. However, inequality is observed in the net enrollment ratio (NER), which measures age-appropriate enrollment, shows that while more children are attending school, gaps persist. NER for Grades 6-8 increased from 89.7 percentto 93.33 percent, but in Grades 1-5, it slightly declined from 97.1 percentto 96.9 percent. The biggest challenge lies in secondary education (Grades 9-12), where enrollment drops significantly. Only 35.8 percentof students in the appropriate age group are enrolled in Grades 11-12, highlighting major barriers to higher education access (MOEST, 2021). Economic factors, gender inequalities, caste discrimination, and the rural-urban divide continue to limit educational opportunities, especially for marginalized

Indicators	Girls	Boys	Total
Percentage that reaches Grade 5	89.1	88.7	88.9
Percentage that reaches Grade 8	83.8	83.2	83.5
Percentage that reaches Grade 5 without repetition	59.0	58.5	59.0
Percentage that reaches Grade 8 without repetition	50.1	48.0	49.0
Percentage that drops out	20.4	21.3	20.9

groups. Additionally, the lack of secondary schools in remote areas forces many students to drop out after Grade 10. While Nepal's overall enrollment rates

show progress, the stark inequality in secondary education calls for stronger policies to support disadvantaged students and ensure equitable access to education.

### Inequality in Quality Education

Student academic performance is a key indicator of education quality, reflecting the effectiveness of the learning process (World Bank, 2018). In line with this parameter, the NASA in Nepal highlights a concerning decline in student performance, with overall achievement now below 50 percent(ERO, 2019). Learning outcomes in grades 3, 5, and 8 remain critically low, reflecting gaps in foundational



education (MOEST, 2024). The 2024 Secondary Education Examinations (SEE) results highlight significant educational inequality in Nepal as a large number of students scored below a 2.0 GPA out of 4 (MOEST, 2024). Out of 464,785 examinees, only 47.86 percent of students passed the SEE where 52.13 percent were classified as non-graded, meaning they failed to meet the minimum required GPA for grade 11. Only 47.87 percent of students secured a GPA above 1.60. Even though some students had the opportunity to retake exams, the overall low performance indicates systemic issues like teacher shortages and resource disparities, contributing to these inequalities in academic achievement. A stark contrast is seen between community and private schools while only 4 percent of students from public schools secured a GPA between 3.20 and 4.00, the figure was significantly higher at 40.84 percent for private school students. This data underscores deep-rooted inequalities in education quality, where students from public schools face systemic disadvantages in resources, teaching quality, and learning opportunities compared to their private school counterparts.

According to the Flash Report 2021/2022, the survival rate, which measures how many students stay in school, shows major gaps. While 88.9 percent of students reach Grade 5, this number drops to 83.5 percent in Grade 8 and even lower to 66.2 percent in Grade 9. The most alarming drop is in Grade 12, where only 33.1 percent of students remain in school, meaning two-thirds drop out before completing their education. This shows that many children, especially those from poor and marginalized communities, face barriers such as poverty, poor school facilities, untrained teachers, and social pressures. These gaps underscore the urgent need to address educational inequalities to improve learning outcomes for all children, particularly those in marginalized and underserved communities.

The data provided in Flash Report 2021/2022 reveals significant inequalities in academic achievement between students from the Dalit community and other ethnic groups in Nepal. Despite various educational initiatives, Dalit students consistently score lower in key subjects like Nepali, English, and Science. This performance gap is especially evident when compared to the higher achievements of Brahmin/Chhetri students, who generally score above national average. The disparity is stark, with Hill Brahmin students outperforming Madhesi Dalit students by a difference of up to 30 points in Nepali, 26 points in both Science and English (ERO, 2020). Such persistent underachievement highlights the deeper, structural inequalities faced by Dalit communities, including limited access to educational resources, socio-economic challenges, and the effects of historical marginalization. These disparities underscore the need for targeted policies and programs to address the unique barriers Dalit students face in the education system and promote more equitable outcomes for all ethnic groups.

The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions, and Equity (CREATE, 2011; Vaishand Gupta, 2008) emphasized that wealth along with gender, location, caste, religious background, language barriers and disability plays a major role in school attendance, progress and access to education. These are the factors that widen the education inequality.

1. **Economic status based Inequality:** Access to education is deeply influenced by economic status. Family's income and parents' education level play a big role in determining a child's education (National Statistics Office, 2024). Wealthier families can afford better schooling to their children whereas children from poorer families with less-educated parents tend to perform worse in school in public school. For example, national census of 2021 shows that 91 percent of the poor families send their wards to public school while 65 percent of the rich families send their wards in private school. This reiterates

that family's financial and social status strongly influences education (Breen and Jonsson, 2005). Porta et al. (2011) studied how family income affects school attendance in developing countries, especially in South Asia. They found large gaps in education between rich and poor households.

Table 2: No of students in secondary (9-12) level

Province	Total			Community			Institutional			Community	
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	% Girls	% Girls
Province 1	156350	149938	306288	123865	109891	233756	32485	40047	72532	53.0	44.8
Madhesh	128040	137801	265841	115374	117434	232776	12666	20367	33065	49.6	38.3
Bagmati	185864	187738	373602	118762	102003	220741	67102	85735	152861	53.8	43.9
Gandaki	84914	84470	169384	68124	61968	130044	16790	22502	39340	52.4	42.7
Lumbini	160006	157252	317258	133612	120391	254003	26394	36861	63255	52.6	41.7
Karnali	70753	67163	137916	68385	63782	132167	2368	3381	5749	51.7	41.2
Sudurpaschim	104426	95439	199865	94861	80490	175351	9565	14949	24514	54.1	39.0
Nepal	890353	879801	1770154	722983	655959	1378838	167370	223842	391316	52.4	42.8

According to the Fourth Nepal Living Standards Survey, in 2023, 20.27 percent of Nepal's population lived below the poverty line. However, inequalities remain between urban and rural areas, with poverty rates at 18.34 percent in urban regions compared to 24.66 percent in rural areas. Significant

provincial differences further illustrate this inequality; Sudurpaschim Province has the highest poverty rate at 34.16 percent, while Gandaki Province has the lowest at 11.88 percent (National Statistics Office, 2024). These figures indicate that economic opportunities and access to resources remain unevenly distributed, reinforcing broader inequalities in education.

Table 3: No of student's in basic level (G1-8)

Province	Total			Community			Institutional			Community	
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	% Girls	% Girls
Province 1	405608	429505	835113	281360	272186	553546	124248	157319	281567	50.8	44.1
Madhesh	580112	588410	1168522	508364	460504	968868	71748	127906	199654	52.5	35.9
Bagmati	445175	498123	943298	257902	256518	514420	187273	241605	428878	50.1	43.7
Gandaki	186151	207377	393528	132889	135933	268822	53262	71444	124706	49.4	42.7
Lumbini	468355	512404	980759	363025	358213	721238	105330	154191	259521	50.3	40.6
Karnali	204329	204986	409315	191126	185556	376682	13203	19430	32633	50.7	40.5
Sudurpaschim	284932	300513	585445	248920	226941	475861	46012	73572	119584	52.3	38.5
Nepal	2584662	2741318	5325980	1983586	1895851	3879437	601076	845467	1446543	51.1	41.6

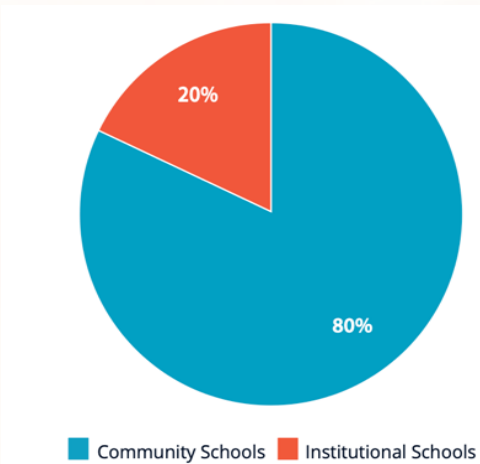


Figure 1: Share of Community and Institutional Schools

school enrollment is disproportionately higher among the economically privileged (65 percent), while disadvantaged groups remain confined to public schools (91 percent) with limited resources.

Among the 34,816 schools across the country, 80 percent are public schools, which cater primarily to economically disadvantaged students, while the remaining 20 percent are institutional (private) schools. Although the number of institutional schools has slightly increased by 188 from 2019, the overall enrollment in public schools still significantly surpasses that in institutional schools. The inequality is evident in student enrollment

The expansion of private schools in Nepal has intensified educational inequalities, as high costs make them inaccessible to children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Mathema, 2007). The persistent economic inequality in Nepal, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged regions, limits access to educational resources and opportunities, reinforcing broader inequalities in education. Children from lower-income groups are prevented from gaining access to quality education due to tuition fees, indirect expenses, and economic compulsion to serve as child laborers (World Bank, 2020). As a result, private



data. Out of the total 5,325,980 students in grades 1-8, 66.6 percent are in basic levels (grades 1-5), with a larger proportion (72.2 percent) enrolled in public schools. In contrast, only 27.8 percent of basic level students attend institutional schools, indicating that private education is less accessible to the majority of students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds.

Economic inequality significantly affects school choices in Nepal. Poorer households are overwhelmingly dependent on public schools, with 90.8 percent of their children enrolled in these institutions due to the lower cost. This inequality highlights how financial status determines access to educational resources. Urban areas, where incomes are generally higher, see more students in private schools compared to rural areas. In Kathmandu Valley, 67.7 percent (National Statistics Office, 2024) of students attend private institutions, reflecting the advantage of wealthier urban families. In Bagmati Province, private schools enroll about half of the student population, while in economically disadvantaged Karnali Province, only 14 percent of students can access private education. This contrast shows how economic inequality limits educational choices and opportunities for poorer families, widening the gap in learning outcomes and future prospects.

At all levels, rural and poor children have completion rates below the national average, whereas urban and richer children have completion rates above the national average. In particular, children belonging to the poorest quintile have much lower completion rates than other groups.

(Source: Nepal\_FactSheet\_2023)

The enrollment figures (table 2 and 3) show a gendered trend: public schools tend to enroll more girls (51.1 percent), whereas private schools have a higher proportion of boys (41.6 percent). This suggests that economic and social factors influence not only school choice but also the gender distribution across different types of schools. This data underscores the economic barriers that prevent many children, from rural and lower-income families, from accessing private education.

Hence, both family income and parents' education level are key factors in a child's education. Poorer families and those with lower education levels face significant challenges, which are further influenced by social factors such as gender, caste, and location.

2. Location specific Inequality

Educational access varies significantly between urban and rural areas. In cities, children have better access to well-funded private schools, whereas in rural and remote regions, public schools are often the only option, with limited infrastructure and teaching resources. Around 45 percent of children in urban areas attend private schools,

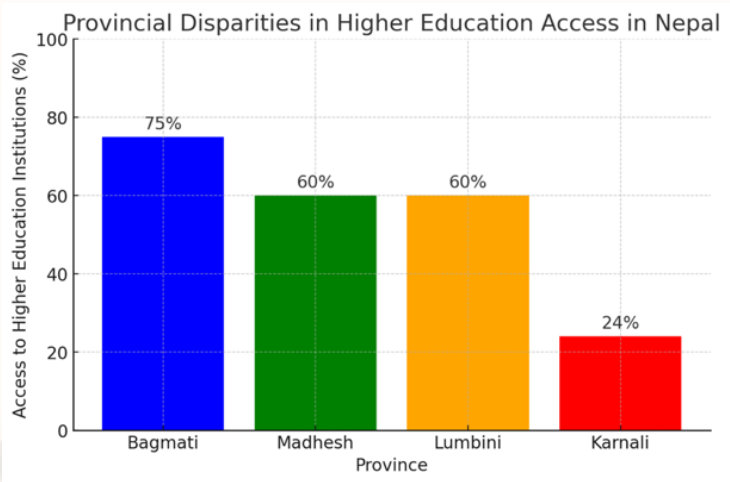


Figure 2 : Provincial inequalities in higher education access



highlighting the stark gap in access based on geographic location. For instance, in Bagmati Province, economic inequalities in education are evident, with 428,878 (45.5 percent) students in private schools and 514,420 (54.5 percent) in public schools (MOEST, 2021). The 27.8 percentshare of private schools reflects how wealthier families access better education, while lower-income students rely on under-resourced public schools. This gap limits opportunities for disadvantaged students and increases financial strain on middle-class families.

Geographic inequality in education access is evident across Nepal's provinces, impacting students' learning opportunities and outcomes. Access to educational facilities in Nepal remains relatively high, with most households reporting that schools and universities are within a reasonable distance. According to the *Nepal Living Standards Survey 2022/23*, 95.9 percentof households are within 30 minutes of an Early Childhood Development (ECD) center, 90.8percenthave access to a basic school (Grades 1-8), and 79.9percentcan reach a secondary school (up to Grade 12) within the same timeframe. However, access declines at higher levels of education, with only 60.9 percent of households within 30 minutes of a college, campus, or university. This trend highlights a provincial inequality in educational accessibility, particularly for higher education. Bagmati Province reports the highest access to colleges or universities, with 75 percentof households having a higher education institution nearby, while Madhesh and Lumbini provinces follow with just over 60 percent. In Karnali Province, access is the lowest, with only 75 percent of households near basic education facilities, 52 percentnear secondary schools, and just 24 percentnear universities—significantly below national averages.

Studies also found that mountainous and remote areas have poor school infrastructure and professional teachers (Bajracharya, 2019). These geographic disparities in access to educational facilities deepen regional inequalities, affecting students' academic achievements and future socioeconomic opportunities.

A similar pattern of geographic inequality exists in the distribution of technical stream schools, model schools, and institutional (private) schools across Nepal. Lumbini Province has the highest share of technical stream schools (20.2 percent), whereas Karnali Province has the lowest (6.2 percent). Likewise, Koshi Province leads in model schools (19.2 percent), while Karnali again has the lowest share (8.8 percent). This trend continues in institutional (private) schools, where Bagmati Province dominates with 27.8 percent, while Karnali Province lags significantly at 6.3 percent. The higher concentration of technical, model, and institutional schools in developed regions like Bagmati and Lumbini reflects greater investments in education infrastructure, whereas remote provinces such as Karnali remain underserved.

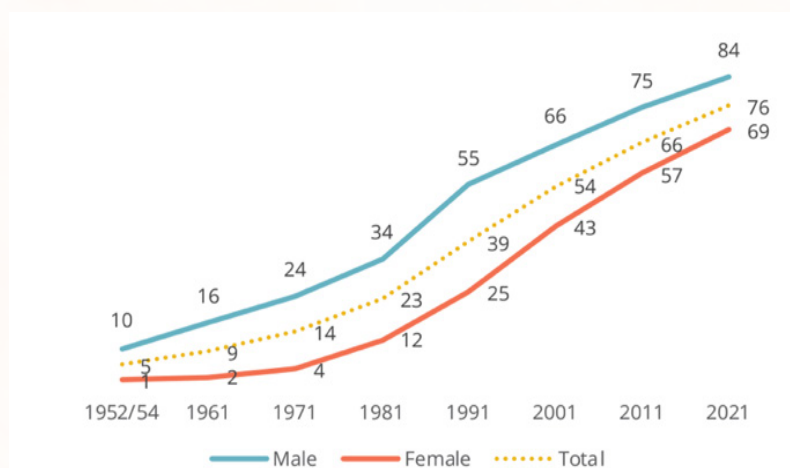
These location specific disparities underscore systemic regional inequalities in Nepal's education system. The lack of quality schools and technical education facilities in remote regions limits students' opportunities for skill development and higher education, thereby perpetuating economic and social inequalities. As a result, many are forced to migrate to regions with better educational resources.

### 3. Gender based Inequality

Gender inequality refers to unequal perception and behaviors of individuals based on the gender. It is a socially constructed characteristic. At the basic education level (grades 1-8), the gender gap is minimal, with near-equal enrollment between boys and girls. However, the inequality widens at the secondary level, particularly in grades 11-12, where the GPI drops to 0.93 (MOEST, 2021). This decline indicates that more girls drop out before completing higher secondary education. While literacy rates have improved for both genders, men continue to have higher literacy levels. Over the past decade, male literacy increased from 71.6 percent to 82.9 percent, while female literacy rose from 44.5 percent to 64.1 percent (MOEST, 2021). The gap is narrowing among the younger generation, with literacy rates nearly equal among 15- to 19-year-olds.

Several social and economic barriers contribute to this gender inequality. Family responsibilities are a major reason for school dropouts, with 21.4 percent of girls leaving school to take care of household chores and siblings, especially in rural areas. Early marriage is another significant factor, affecting 19.2 percent of girls nationwide and exceeding 32 percent in provinces like Karnali and Sudurpaschim (National Statistics Office, 2024). Once married, many girls are unable to continue their education, reinforcing cycles of poverty and limiting their opportunities. Girls, Dalit children, and children of the indigenous groups of peoples are systematically deprived of mainstream education (Caddell, 2007).

#### Gender Gap in Women's Literacy



Source: Population Censuses of Nepal, 1952-2021<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 3:** Literacy rate of aged 5 years and above (percent), 1952-2021

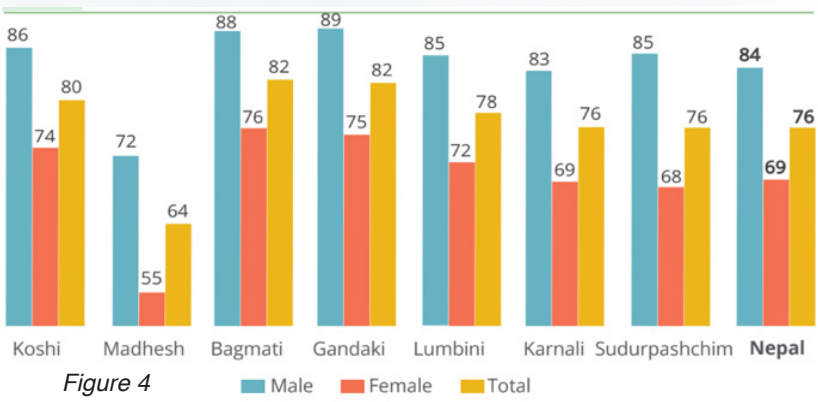
introduction of free and compulsory primary education in 1975, literacy rates have steadily improved for both genders.

Despite these, a notable gender gap in literacy remains. In 2021, 84 percent of men were literate compared to 69 percent of women, showing a 17.7 percentage point difference, which is higher than the South Asia average gap of 15.7 percent (World Bank). The Nepalese government aims to achieve 99 percent youth literacy by 2023/24 through its 15th Periodic

Nepal has made significant progress in literacy over the past decades, with 76 percent of the population aged five and above being literate in 2021. Historically, literacy levels were extremely low, with only 5 percent of the population able to read and write in the early 1950s. Among them, only 1 percent of women and 10 percent of men were literate (MoWCSC, 2024). However, since the



Plan. Encouragingly, among youth aged 15-24 years, literacy rates have risen to 93 percent for men and 88 percent for women, indicating that the gender gap is gradually closing (Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2020).



Source: National Population and Housing Census, 2021

Furthermore, gender inequalities remain

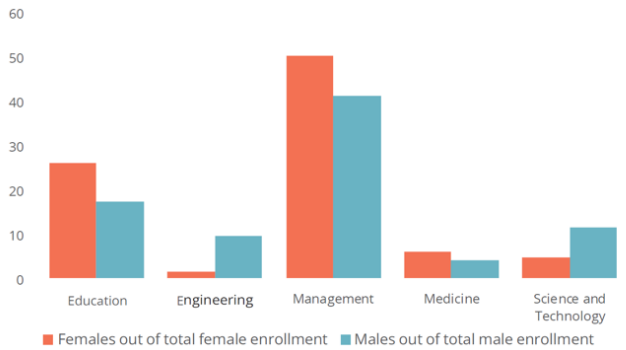
significant in some provinces as shown in figure 4 with Madhesh Province facing the highest literacy gap. In 2021, only 55 percent of women in Madhesh were literate, compared to 72 percent of men, marking the lowest literacy rates for both genders among all provinces. Despite national efforts to improve education, Madhesh remains an outlier, as youth literacy gaps have almost disappeared in other provinces (CBS, 2020).

To address this issue of gender gap in education, the Madhesh provincial government introduced an education and insurance scheme in 2022, known as “*betipadhao, betibachao*” (teach girl and save girl) program, bicycle distribution program, Daughter Education Insurance/Fixed-Term Savings Program (World Bank). This initiative aims to encourage girls' education and reduce early marriage by providing financial incentives. While such policies are a step forward, sustained investment in educational infrastructure, awareness programs, and socio-economic support is essential to fully bridge the literacy gender gap in Madhesh and similar disadvantaged regions.

### Gender Inequality in STEM Education

Enrollment data illustrates the gender divide in educational choices, with only 18 percent of students in Science and Engineering programs being women. Conversely, nearly half of the students in Arts, Education, and Management programs are female. This trend is even more pronounced when examining specific technical fields: in Engineering, only 2 percent of students are female, while in Science and Technology, only 5 percent of students are women compared to 12 percent male participation.

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



Source: Annual report 2020/21, University Grants Commission

This disparity in enrollment is compounded by gender biases, which influence the educational pathways of girls in Nepal. In 2020, only 6 percent of girls in Nepal were studying science and technology (UGC, 2020). The gender gap becomes even clearer when analyzing overall program enrollments: 80.28 percent of students are enrolled in general programs, while only 19.72 percent are in technical programs. Specifically, the enrollment rates in faculties like Management (44.41 percent), Education



(21.54 percent), and Humanities (10.54 percent) are far higher than those in Science and Technology (7.93 percent), Medicine (5.2 percent), and Engineering (5.21 percent).

Globally, only 35 percent of women are involved in science, technology, and innovation, according to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2017). These statistics reflect the critical need for focused efforts to address the gender gap in STEM, not only in Nepal but globally, to ensure equal opportunities and participation for women in these transformative fields. In Nepal too, Women remain significantly underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education and careers. According to the Nepal Labor Force Survey (2017-18), only 0.5 percent of economically active women are employed in the ICT sector, highlighting the gender gap in technical professions. Similarly, UNESCO's report (2017) reveals that women make up just 7.8 percent of researchers in Nepal, indicating a considerable underrepresentation in scientific research roles. This gender imbalance in STEM fields is further emphasized by the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2021), which places Nepal in a particularly challenging position.

#### **4. Caste-based Inequality**

Access to education is also influenced by caste. Although the caste system was officially abolished in the early 1960s with the introduction of the *Muluki Ain* (Civil Code-1961), and caste-based discrimination was later made unlawful in the constitutions of 1990, 2007, and 2015, Dalit people and communities (13 percent of country's population) continue to face significant social and economic disadvantages. In Nepal, caste-based inequality remains a significant barrier to accessing education (Mosse, 2018), with children from marginalized caste groups, particularly Dalits (as they face severe disadvantages in comparison to children from dominant caste groups like Brahmins, Chhetris, and Newars). Research by Dahal et al. (2002), DFID and World Bank (2006), and Bennett et al. (2008) highlights how caste influences disparities in poverty, education, and health, with higher caste groups having better access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The literacy rate among Dalit populations is far below the national average (ERO, 2020) with large gaps in both basic level and secondary school enrollment rates 18 percent and 12.3 percent respectively. Dalit children are more likely to be out of school due to poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to resources such as proper school facilities and support systems.

Hence, caste continues to be a defining factor in determining access to education in Nepal, with Dalit children facing considerable challenges in comparison to their peers from higher caste groups.

#### **5. Language based inequality**

Language plays a significant role in determining educational outcomes in Nepal, particularly for students from different indigenous and linguistic backgrounds. While Nepali speakers tend to have an advantage in the education system, non-Nepali speakers often face challenges that impact their academic performance. The National Assessment of Student Achievement report (NASA, 2020) found a notable inequality in the success rates between Nepali-speaking and non-Nepali-speaking students (Khanal

et al., 2020). For Nepali-speaking students, the medium of instruction and educational materials are generally more accessible, making it easier for them to grasp lessons and achieve higher academic results. On the other hand, non-Nepali speakers, who may come from indigenous or minority language backgrounds, often struggle with the language of instruction. This language barrier significantly affects their accessibility to education and more to the understanding of lessons, resulting in higher failure rates and lower academic achievement. The review of the contemporary newspapers, magazines and teachers' occasional interviews shows that the system tend of blame the parents aof the marginalized children. Their expressions like, "children of the *Janajati* (indigenous people) cannot learn as that of the others. The parents take no interest to the education of their children. So is the case of the students: they are not regular in school and pay less attention to study". This, in William Ryan's 9971's term, "blaming the victim" mindset of the teachers shows that they belong to the higher income group and the higher caste group. Because of this mindset, teachers seem less empathetic to the education of the marginalized children.

The National Assessment of Student Achievement (NASA) reports (ERO, 2020) shows that non-Nepali-speaking students tend to have higher failure rates, particularly in subjects where language proficiency is crucial for success (Khanal, 2020). This gap in achievement further reinforces the idea that language plays a pivotal role in shaping educational outcomes in Nepal. To address this issue, it is essential to implement inclusive educational policies that provide language support and ensure that non-Nepali speakers have equal opportunities to succeed.

## 6. Disability based Inequality

Children with disabilities face many challenges in accessing education, making them one of the most disadvantaged groups. According to UNICEF (2019), only 3 percent of children with disabilities attend school, primarily due to inaccessible educational environments and societal discrimination. UNICEF (2021) reports that 47 percent of children with disabilities are more likely to be out of primary school, 33 percent at lower secondary, and 27 percent at upper secondary, compared to children without disabilities. Although policies support inclusive education, many schools still lack proper facilities, trained teachers, and necessary resources to accommodate their needs. In the past, these children were mostly educated in separate schools, but there is a growing understanding that mainstream schools should be more inclusive. In Nepal, the participation of children with disabilities in formal education remains low. According to the Flash Report 2021/22, only a small percentage of children with disabilities (below 1 percent) are enrolled in schools, and many drop out due to a lack of accessibility and support. Even for those who attend school, learning achievement is lower compared to their peers without disabilities (Daniel, 2024). The pace of learning varies widely among students with disabilities, requiring differentiated instruction, personalized learning support, and adapted teaching materials.

Inclusive education policies in Nepal recognize these issues, but their implementation remains weak. Many schools lack trained teachers, assistive technologies, and accessible learning environments. As a result, students with disabilities struggle to keep up with mainstream education, reinforcing educational inequalities.



## Educational Policies and Programs in Nepal

Nepal's education system has undergone significant reforms aimed at addressing systemic inequality, especially in the past few decades. Several key policies and programs reflect these efforts like Constitution of Nepal (2015) guarantees the right to education for all citizens and mandates free and compulsory education up to the secondary level. It emphasizes inclusive education and the provision of education to marginalized groups, including children from Dalit, indigenous, and backward communities. The Education Act (1971) introduced the concept of free primary education, which aimed to provide equitable access to education for all children in Nepal. Over time, this was expanded to include free education up to Grade 12 in public schools. Similarly, School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) (2016-2023) aims to improve the quality of education, promote inclusive education, and reduce inequalities in educational outcomes between rural and urban areas, as well as between private and public schools. Nepal Government has policies for inclusive education, such as scholarships for underprivileged students and gender-sensitive curriculum (MOE, 2019). This plan addresses the need for quality infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum reforms, with particular emphasis on marginalized communities. The government provides scholarships to marginalized groups such as Dalits, indigenous people, and children with disabilities to help reduce financial barriers to education. Policies such as the Gender Equality Act (2006) and the Gender Equality and Empowerment Framework aim to close gender gaps in education by promoting female education, addressing dropout rates, and increasing girls' participation in higher education and STEM fields. Under the decentralization framework, local governments are tasked with improving education within their jurisdictions, offering them the flexibility to implement specific programs that cater to local needs and challenges.

Nepal's government has put in place several progressive policies and programs aimed at reducing systemic inequalities in education, challenges persist in ensuring equitable access and quality education across all regions and communities, to ensure sustainable improvements in the education sector.

**Table 1: Key policies and the programs to reduce inequality in education**

Key policies	Programs
Free and compulsory education	Free textbooks; no fee programs; special programs for Dalits and girls of remote rural area; sanitary pad for girls; midday meal for all
Support for quality education support	Model school program; vocational and technical schools in each Palikas (local governments); supply of computers and smart boards; STEM education; integrated curriculum
Special attention	Gender focal person; resource center for disables; help desk at Palikas



## Conclusion

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Inequality persists everywhere. Celebrating inequality is one way of addressing it; reducing inequality to attain equity is the egalitarian approach and the demand of the day. But the problem is that inequality in access to and quality in education is a multi-faceted issue of Nepal driven by economic, social, and geographic factors. While efforts have been made to increase access, disparities in both access and the quality of education they receive continue to reinforce inequalities. Inequality is an inherent challenge in education, and while it may not be completely eliminated, efforts can be made to reduce it. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering inclusivity, which is key to addressing inequalities. Research focused on access and quality is essential for understanding and addressing the gaps. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions, including equitable resource distribution, inclusive policies, and a stronger commitment to improving the quality of public education. By combining efforts to ensure both access to and quality of education, we can create a more equitable learning environment for all students.

## Recommendations: The Inclusive Approach

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To effectively reduce inequality in education, inclusive approach is needed, encompassing both blanket and specific strategies. Following are the general approach and group-specific approach recommendations

### General measures

- Sensitivity and attention towards diverse groups: Children from marginalized communities, such as girls, Dalits, Janajatis, or those economically disadvantaged, disabilities must be given special attention to address their unique challenges and needs.
- Integrating earning and learning: Students of the excluded or disadvantaged groups should be prepared to understand that learning and earning can go together. They must be done by relating children's household chores with classroom learning and engaging them with economic activities while in school. This helps remove the barrier between formal learning and real-world earning opportunities.
- Specialized counseling for vulnerable groups: Providing targeted emotional and academic support to students from marginalized or challenging backgrounds ensures they are not left behind through guidance and counseling help reduce educational inequality.
- Peer counseling programs: Encouraging students to share their experiences and challenges with peers fosters empathy, provides emotional support, and creates a more inclusive environment for all especially to the children of the educationally unequal groups.
- Quality educational institutions: Establishing quality educational institutions in remote locations such as Karnali as well can ensure access to quality education to all.

- Quality public schools: Ensuring quality of public schools are more than private schools by adopting two measures: i) by providing competent teachers in all public schools by upgrading them; ii) by building and providing necessary infrastructures and tools/equipment necessary for education.
- Proportionate number of schools: Providing proportional number of schools as per number of population and factoring geographical difficulties, especially in remote areas.
- Free education for all: Ensuring free education (including fee, educational materials and school meal) for all (at least up to higher secondary education)
- Align curriculum with life skills: Making curriculum of education aligning to life skills and employment opportunities.

### Group-specific measures:

This study has come up with the group specific measures to ensure educational justice to all the unequal children. These measures are mentioned in the table below:

Group (Faces)	Issue	Measures
<b>Girls</b>	Change the gendered mindset for egalitarian mindset	1. Challenge cultural norms like machoism. 2. Encourage girls for equal participation in home and academic responsibilities.
<b>Dalit</b>	Touchability/untouchability	1. Promote inclusivity through shared food practices (e.g., drinking and eating together). 2. Educate both the children of the Dalits and non-Dalit children about equality and eliminate caste-based restrictions.
<b>Disabled children</b>	Socio-cultural psyche against disable children; and respect to the physically, mentally, and emotionally challenged children's feelings	1. Provide special classes and teachers. 2. Offer specialized materials and counseling services for emotional support. 3. Provide inclusive infrastructure 4. Orient students to peer, share, and educate their physically and mentally challenged friends and colleagues
<b>Urban – Rural</b>	Inequalities in educational achievement and social status	1. Implement student and teacher exchanges between urban and rural areas. 2. Share learning experiences from different settings (e.g., rural school food sharing).

<b>Language</b>	Enable students to learn each other's language	1. Provide language therapy to the students of different language groups for native speaker like pronunciation. 2. Offer linguistic and cultural education for their preservation and development  3. Learn and respect the use of languages  4. Encourage students to learn each others' language and script  5. Enable them to write multilingual dictionary, multilingual stories, poems, essays etc
<b>Culture</b>	Celebration of multicultural values, dresses, foods, ways of thinking and doings	Organize programs to celebrate multicultural values, dresses, foods, ways of thinking and doings at schools and workplaces

The aforesaid programs must be implemented at home, school, neighbours simultaneously. For example, inequalities related to gender, caste, ethnicity, language, religion, and disability can be discussed at home, at neighbours, and at community with the support of schoolteachers. Schools can celebrate multicultural food, dress, and values festivals. They can organize multilingual dictionary making programs, literary festivals, script writing sessions, each other's language learning competitions and collaboration programs. Local, province and federal government can establish scholarship programs and financial assistance for marginalized families to reduce the economic burden of education.



# Food and Hunger Inequality

-Sanjay Hamal, Ph.D.

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# Introduction

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Nepal's landscape is markedly distinct from where it was ten years ago when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals or the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, were adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2015. Over the past decade, Nepal has undergone significant changes, shaped by both progress and persistent challenges. The country continues to grapple with recurring crises fueled by climate change, environmental degradation, elevated food costs, global conflicts impact, pandemics, resource scarcity, migration, democracy, governance, and food policies, 'all of which undermine access to the healthy, nutritious, and sufficient food that its citizens have a right to thrive' (Fu et al., 2025). Ten years ago, as a universal call to action and a commitment to end poverty and hunger in all dimensions and to craft an equal, just, and secure world- for people, planet, and prosperity, the 17 integrated and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals and their 169 targets: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was adopted by 193 Member States at the historic United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Summit in September 2015 which came into effect on January 1, 2016.

Out of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, SDG Goal 2, *Zero Hunger*, targets to end all forms of hunger (2.1), end all forms of malnutrition (2.2), double the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers (2.3), sustainable food production and resilient agricultural practices (2.4), and maintain the genetic diversity in food production (2.5) by 2030. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Nepal, alongside the international community, has committed to prioritizing the eradication of hunger, food insecurity, and all forms of malnutrition for those who are furthest behind by 2030. However, it has to be acknowledged that the role of food and nutrition in the SDGs extends significantly beyond the explicit targets of Goal 2 (Zero Hunger). Meaning, that Goal 2 encompasses intricate synergies and potential tensions with many other interrelated goals, including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), and SDG 10 (Reduce Inequalities) (Béné et al., 2019). Hence, as we enter 2025, five years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and five years away from 2030 for achieving the SDGs, it is an opportune time for the country to critically reflect on its progress toward food and nutrition.

To analyze the drivers of food and hunger inequality in Nepal, the report relies on existing literature and data. By relying solely on secondary sources from government and non-government organizations' reports, data portals, scientific papers, books, journals, newspaper/website articles, case studies, etc., this report examines how food insecurity intersects with other forms of inequality, such as economic, social, environmental, geography, etc. The food inequality statistics of Nepal are derived from the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, which assessed food insecurity using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale. Nepal's and the world's Global Hunger Index scores are taken from the Global Hunger Index score report to show  $\geq 50.0$  as extremely alarming, 35.0-49.9 as alarming, 20.0-34.0 as serious, 10.0-19.9 as moderate, and  $\leq 9.9$  as low. By examining the multifaceted nature of food and hunger inequality in Nepal, the report seeks to contribute to the broader discourse of food and hunger inequality and aims to inform/recommend policy environments to promote equitable access to food.

## Conceptualizing Food Security : Analyzing How Food Insecurity Leads to Food Inequality

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To understand the complexities of food and hunger inequality, the foremost step is to understand the concepts of '*food security*', '*food sovereignty*', and the '*right to food*'. "Food security is a situation when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (HLPE, 2020, p. 7). Food security definition features four important dimensions ensuring not only *availability* and *accessibility* but also *utilization* (referring to the nutritional uptake) and *stability* (referring to the constancy of the other three dimensions). While the four core dimensions of food security remain fundamental, they lack critical dimensions like '*agency*' and '*sustainability*', rooted in the right to food principles and considered essential for transforming food systems in the direction of meeting Sustainable Development Goals (HLPE, 2020, p. 7).

Likewise, "food sovereignty is a condition when all people have a right to a healthy and culturally appropriate food produced in an ecologically sound manner, and their right to determine their own food and agriculture systems" (Mann, 2014). Food sovereignty, thus, emphasizes and aims to guarantee and protect people's space, ability, and right to define their models of production, distribution, and consumption (Pimbert and Claeys, 2004).

The right to food, on the other hand, is governed by the principles of human rights where, State as a duty bearer, has the responsibility to ensure the right to food for its all citizens (Ghale, et al. 2018). The right to food therefore requires the State to ensure provisions related to respect, protection, and fulfillment of specific obligations as prescribed by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food.

The concepts of food security, food sovereignty, and/or right to food, conceptually encompass availability, accessibility, affordability, stability, and utilization through both production and supplies from imports (FAO, 2008). Hence, the absence or disruption of some or all of the food security dimensions- availability, access, utilization, and stability- can be regarded as food insecurity, thereby resulting in food inequality, hence, creating inequalities in access, availability, and control (agency) over food resources. Though food security has been used as a concept to understand food inequality, unlike food security which is a condition of physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food, the chapter focuses on food inequality and looks into the uneven distribution and access to food among different groups and communities of people across social-economic status, ethnicity, caste, and geography – regions and provinces.. For conceptual clarity, the report also adopts, some if not all, widely accepted food security dimensions of security to analyze the food and hunger inequality in Nepal and explores how these dimensions intersect with other factors of inequality like poverty, vulnerability, injustices, climate change, gender, caste, age group, region, etc., to name a few which exacerbate food inequality.

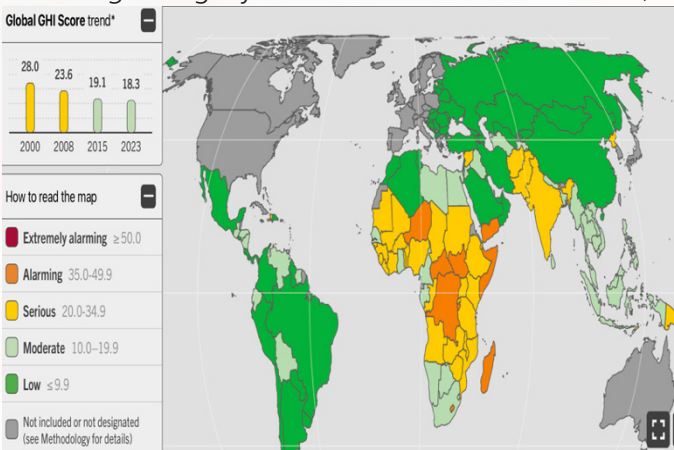


# Food and Hunger Inequality: One Index, Two Realities, the Hunger Divide between Global South and North

Food insecurity and hunger issues are both pressing and alarming in the Global South- the term associated with denoting regions like Latin America, Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Caribbean- where around 84 percent of the world's total population<sup>1</sup> resides. Global South is one of a family of terms, including "Third World" and "Periphery," that denotes regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) less powerful, low-income, and often politically or culturally marginalized (Dados & Connell, 2012, p.12).

Out of 136 countries assessed, 42 countries from the Global South are indicated as both *hunger serious* (36 countries) and *alarming* (6 countries).

The 2024 GHI map illustrates stark inequalities in hunger levels between the Global South and the Global North, reinforcing the long-standing patterns of economic inequality, food insecurity, and structural vulnerabilities. Most of the Global North countries, Figure 1, indicate low levels of hunger ( $\leq 9.9$  GHI score). No country in the Global North falls into the *hunger alarming* or *extremely alarming* category. The Global South countries, on the other hand, are marked by high hunger levels



**Figure 1.** Hung Inequality Map, Global South Vs. Global North

The stark inequality in food between the global South and North is because of the structural inequalities. The Global South bears the brunt of food inequality due to systemic challenges like colonial legacies, 'as colonialism fundamentally plundered the resources, disrupted and suppressed the existing food security system, resulting in widespread poverty, chronic food shortages, and malnourishment' (Bjornlund et al., 2022, p. 846), economic dependency, weak food system, climate shocks, armed conflict, political instability, and climate-induced droughts and floods.

To sum up, the 2024 GHI reflects the persistent divide between the Global South and Global North, with hunger remaining a pressing challenge in the Global South. The uneven distribution of hunger and malnutrition in all its forms is rooted in inequalities of social, political, and economic power (Global Hunger Index, 2017, p. 25). Those who are powerful enough to control food system determine who consumes it and who goes hungry. Because of this power imbalance, people are poorer and hungrier in the Global South than in the Global North, and it is in the South where struggles for food security and sovereignty are more pronounced (War on Want, n.d.).

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/populationfacts/docs/MigrationStock2019\\_PopFacts\\_2019-04.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/populationfacts/docs/MigrationStock2019_PopFacts_2019-04.pdf)

## Shared Challenges, Different Impacts: Food and Hunger Inequality Across Regions

The world produces enough food to feed everyone on the planet<sup>2</sup>, nevertheless, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization states that around 733 million people<sup>3</sup> faced hunger in 2023, equivalent to one in eleven people globally<sup>4</sup>. It is estimated that 152 million more people may have faced hunger in 2023 compared to 2019 (FAO et al., 2024). This alarming increase in hunger is reflected in the 2024 Global Hunger Index report, which underscores the persistent challenges in addressing food insecurity worldwide.

The 2024 GHI Index score for the world is 18.3, considered *moderate*, down only slightly from the 2016 score of 18.8, but reveals concerning trends in the global food and hunger situation. Among the data assessed of 136 countries, for the 2024 GHI report, with '*moderate, serious, or alarming 2024 GHI scores*', 22 countries exhibited increased hunger since 2016, whereas in 20 countries, progress has largely stalled- their 2024 GHI scores have declined by less than 5 percent from their 2016 GHI scores or have remained static. Notably, in 5 nations, the 2024 GHI scores are even worse than their 2000 GHI scores, signaling deterioration in food and hunger outcomes. At the current pace, at least 64 countries will not reach *low* hunger- much less Zero Hunger- by 2030, and if the progress remains at the pace observed since 2016, *low* hunger at the global level may not be reached until 2160<sup>5</sup>.

The 2024 GHI findings also highlight multiple overlapping challenges disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations in low-income nations, exacerbating pre-existing systemic inequalities. These challenges include large-scale armed conflicts, increasingly severe climate change impacts, high domestic food prices, market disruptions, high debt burden among low-middle-income countries, income inequality, and economic downturns<sup>6</sup>. These challenges have severely impacted food security worldwide, with some regions facing more severe consequences than others.

South Asia accounts for 25 percent of the global population, yet 41 percent (833 million people) face food insecurity- nearly half severely (FAO et al., 2024, p. 16). Child wasting and stunting remain critical, with Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan worst affected. Although India has demonstrated progress in its GHI score since 2000, the prevalence of child wasting and stunting remains alarmingly high. Similarly, Pakistan faces persistent food insecurity, worsened by inflationary pressures, fiscal deficits, and recurrent natural disasters, including the devastating floods of 2022, which have further strained food availability and access (Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe, 2024). The same report also states that Bangladesh and Nepal have made significant improvements in their GHI scores, 14.4 and 19.4, respectively, but hunger remains a serious concern in these countries.

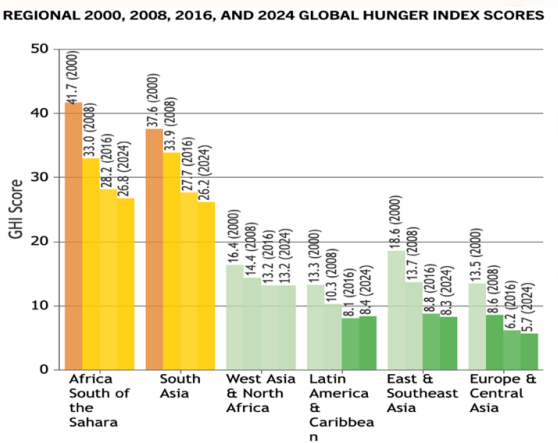


Figure 2. Regional Global Hunger Index Scores

The key drivers of global food inequality can be credited to conflict and governance (e.g., denied aid in Africa, instability in West Asia), climate vulnerability (e.g., droughts in Africa, floods in South

<sup>2</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/10/1048452>

<sup>3</sup> Between 713 and 757 million people (8.9 percent and 9.4 percent of the global population, respectively).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fao.org/americas/news/news-detail/sofi-2024/en>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/>



Asia), and economic shocks (e.g., inflation in Latin America, import reliance in fragile states). These intersecting drivers demonstrate that global hunger stems not from food shortages, but from deeply entrenched inequalities in power, resources, and resilience (FOA, et al 2024). Without addressing these structural imbalances, regional inequalities and inequalities in food security will continue to grow.

## Current Status of Food and Hunger Inequality in Nepal

Nepal promulgated a new constitution in 2015, as an important part of a peace process that restructured the nation into a federal democratic republic. Article 36 of the *Constitution of Nepal 2015* safeguards the rights relating to food stating that 'every citizen shall have the right relating to food, every citizen shall have the right to be safe from the state of being in danger of life from the scarcity of food, and every citizen shall have the right to food sovereignty in accordance with law'. Likewise, the county's *Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, 2057 (2018)*, establishes food as a fundamental right for all citizens, as the Act's Preamble states, ... 'fundamental rights relating to food, food security and food sovereignty of the citizens, conferred by the Constitution of Nepal... and ensuring access of the citizens to foods...', representing a significant milestone in Nepal's effort to fulfill its commitment to addressing malnutrition and food security.

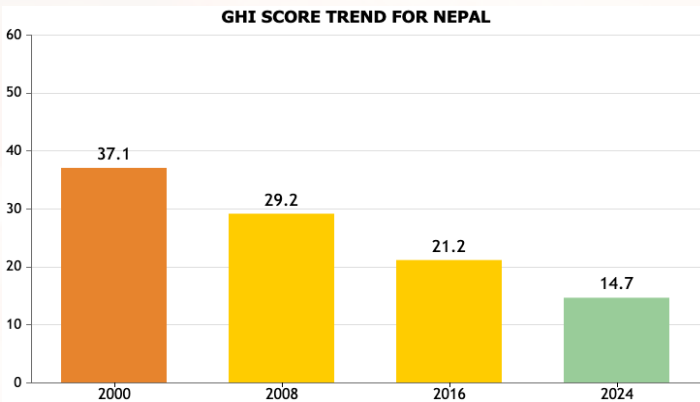
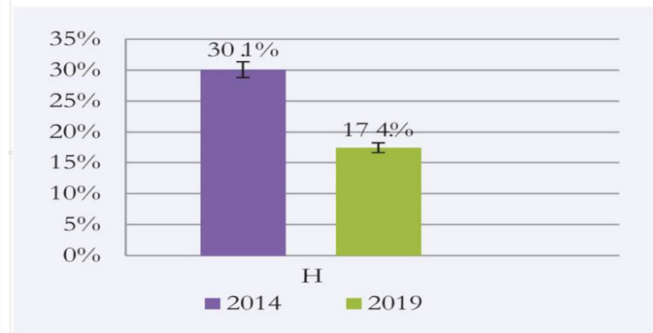


Figure 3. GHI Score Trend for Nepal

level of hunger that is moderate which is far better than its South Asian neighbors, for example, India is at 105<sup>th</sup> position with a 27.3 score, and Pakistan is at 109<sup>th</sup> position with 27.9 score, indicating a serious level of hunger (Concern Worldwide and Multidimensional Poverty in Nepal, 2014-2019



Source: Calculations using the NMICS 2014 and NMICS 2019.

Figure 5. Multidimensional Poverty, Nepal

Over the past two decades, Nepal has made significant progress in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) map- dropping from an alarming level in 2000 with 37.1 GHI index, to a moderate level by 2024, 14.7, on the Global Hunger Index, measured through undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting, and child mortality. The GHI 2024 ranks Nepal at 68<sup>th</sup> position out of 217 countries, with a score of 14.7 and at a

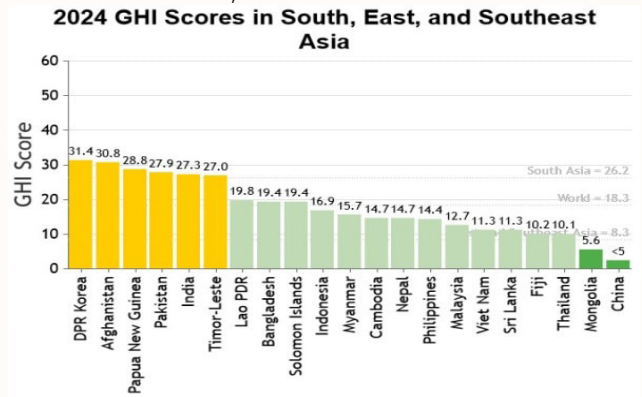


Figure 4. 2024 GHI Scores in South, East, and Southeast Asia

Welthungerhilfe, 2024). Likewise, the country has also been able to reduce multidimensional poverty, from 30.1 percentin 2014 to 17.4 percentin 2019, meaning just under five million individuals remain multidimensionally poor, with a Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) at 0.074



(NPC, 2021). Similarly, the prevalence of stunting declined by 11 percent from 36 percent in 2016 to 25 percent in 2022<sup>7</sup>.

In reality, though, many Nepalese do not enjoy the guarantee of fundamental rights related to food. The Fourth Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS) 2022-23 highlights widespread food insecurity, with over half of the population experiencing varying degrees of inequality and only 48.2 percent of households considered food secure (Chapagai, 2024).

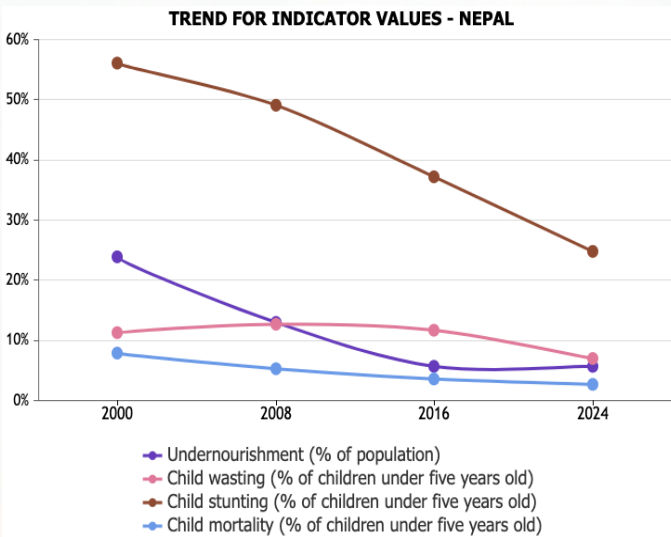


Figure 6. Trend for Indicators Values- Nepal

The Global Hunger Index 2024 also shows that 5.7 percent of Nepal's population's caloric intake is insufficient; child stunting and wasting, affecting 24.8 percent and 7 percent of children under five whose growth is impaired by poor nutrition; and child mortality, which stands at 2.7 percent- and while Nepal has shown encouraging progress across all areas, child stunting remains a significant concern, still recorded in double digits.

Also, the recently launched Human Development Report (HDR) 2023/24, places Nepal in 146<sup>th</sup> position out of 193 countries, at the Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.601, placing the country in the Medium Human Development

category (UNDP, 2024), indicating that Nepal falls into gridlock at times, be it related to decent jobs for youths, spatial and social inequalities, economic growth, etc.

Hence, only five years to 2030, it is evident that the issues related to nutrition, hunger, and food security trends in Nepal are not in the direction of achieving *Zero Hunger* (SDG 2) by 2030. The country though, characterized by a 'moderate' level of hunger in the Global Hunger Index, there are significant inequalities in accessibility, availability, and affordability of food between urban and rural areas; between Terai, hill and mountains, and between provinces. Food and hunger remain a pressing issue in the country and are deeply embedded in historical socio-economic inequalities, land ownership patterns, different forms of discrimination, economic instability, gender inequalities, and environmental vulnerabilities that intersect to exacerbate food insecurity. Nepal's diverse geography, socio-cultural variabilities, and persistent inequalities, despite ongoing efforts, keeps food and nutrition insecurity as a pressing national challenge.

Who are the Food-Insecure Communities/ Groups Furthest Behind: A Critical Reflection?

Nepal, home to 29.1 million people (NSO, 2078), is characterized by remarkable diversity in its social, cultural, religious, and geographical landscapes. The country's diversity is further reflected in its heterogeneous topography and climate spanning from the Himalayan Mountains in the North, through the central hill region, and down to the flatlands of the Terai in the South<sup>8</sup>. Nepal's multifaceted makeup significantly shapes food production, access, and utilization (NPC and WFP, 2019, p. 7). For instance, the Terai though having fertile land, face flooding landlessness,

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wfp.org/countries/nepal>  
<sup>8</sup> Terai ranges in elevation from 100 to 200 meters above sea level and lies in the tropical Southern part of the country with hot and humid climate, mountains ranges in elevation from 200m to 2000m with a mesothermal climate and Himalayas ranges in altitude from 2000 to above 8000m with a tundra type of climate.

and unequal resource access, affecting marginalized groups<sup>9</sup>, whereas the hills on the other hand, struggle with fragmented land, soil erosion, and out-migration, reducing agriculture productivity (GoN/MoAD, 2017) and mountains endure harsh climate, poor soil, and limited infrastructure, leading to chronic food deficits and reliance on imports (UNDP, 2020). Hence, it is obvious that these diversities directly impact food equality and subsistence livelihood, leading to inequalities in food insecurity across geographical regions and social groups.

The Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2022, which assessed food insecurity using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), shows 13 percentof the households (population) had experienced moderate or severe food insecurity, while 1 percentexperienced severe food insecurity (Ministry of Health and Population [Nepal] et al., 2023). The same report also exhibits higher levels of moderate or severe food insecurity in rural areas as compared to urban areas, with 16.2 percentof rural residents affected, compared to 10.6 percentin urban settings. The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity is notably highest in Karnali Province at 31.5 percent, while Gandaki Province reports the lowest at 7.9 percent. Additionally, 5.1 percentof the population in Karnali Province experienced severe food insecurity in the year preceding the survey. Among households in the lowest wealth quintile, the rates of moderate or severe food insecurity (27.2 percent) and severe food insecurity (3.6 percent) are the highest, with both indicators decreasing as wealth increases (Table 1).

**Table 1. Food Insecurity**

Food Insecurity			
Percentage of de jure population with moderate or severe food insecurity, and percentage with severe food insecurity, by background characteristics, Nepal DHS			
2022			
Background characteristic	Percentage with moderate or severe food insecurity <sup>1,2</sup>	Percentage with severe food insecurity <sup>1,2</sup>	Number of persons
<b>Residence</b>			
Urban	10.6	1.0	36090
Rural	16.2	1.9	18054
<b>Ecological Zone</b>			
Mountain	21.3	3.2	3181
Hill	11.9	1.3	21377
Terai	12.0	1.1	29586
<b>Province</b>			
Koshi Province	13.1	1.6	9351
Urban	11.9	1.5	6041
Rural	15.4	1.9	3310

<sup>9</sup> <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/44c8b676-a786-4f31-a83e-db071adfe2cf/content>

Madesh Province	14.3	1.1	11480
Urban	13.2	0.9	8515
Rural	17.4	1.9	2966
Bagmati Province	9.0	0.9	11076
Urban	6.1	0.5	8574
Rural	19.0	2.2	2503
Gandaki Province	7.9	0.8	4860
Urban	7.8	1.1	3272
Rural	8.3	0.3	1588
Lumbini Province	9.7	0.8	9541
Urban	8.4	0.6	5153
Rural	11.3	1.0	4298
Karnali Province	31.5	5.1	3331
Urban	27.8	4.5	1755
Rural	35.7	5.8	1576
Sudurpaschim Province			
Urban	11.8	1.3	4595
Rural	10.9	1.0	2781
	13.2	1.6	1814

#### Wealth Quintile

Lowest	27.2	3.6	10839
Second	16.3	1.5	10836
Middle	10.3	0.9	10839
Fourth	6.7	0.5	10829
Highest	1.8	0.1	10802
Total	12.5	1.3	54144

<sup>1</sup>Food insecurity measures are based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

<sup>2</sup>Household members with any FIES items for which the respondent to the questionnaire refuses to answer or does not know the answer are dropped.

**Source:** Ministry of Health and Population [Nepal], New ERA, and ICF, (2023)

From the above table 1, it is evident that Nepal persistently encounters food insecurity. The report



shows substantial geographical and regional inequalities facing food insecurity and hunger. Food hunger is more pronounced in the rural and mountain areas than in urban and hill and Terai regions. For instance, NDHS (2022) reports 25 percent of children under the age of 5 years as stunted, in which rural and urban areas account for 31 and 22 percent, respectively. Likewise, the proportion of stunting is also higher in the mountain zone (42 percent) as compared to the hill (22 percent) and Terai (25 percent). Similarly, the proportion of stunted children is highest in Karnali Province (36 percent) followed by Madhesh Province (29 percent), whereas it is lowest in Bagmati Province (18 percent).

Food inequality and hunger issues are also more concentrated within certain economically and socially excluded groups and castes. Poor, ethnic, marginal, and endangered ethnic communities are strongly affected by food inequality situations. Among them, Dalit, Indigenous, and marginalized women are most likely to be food insecure. Ethnic, caste, and gender-based inequality is a critical factor contributing to food inequality in Nepal. Ethnic minorities, historically marginalized communities and Indigenous communities, face higher levels of poverty and food inequality. Food insecurity among low-income and disadvantaged families was found to be a serious problem during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is a paucity of research, specifically referring to LGBTQI+ communities' vulnerabilities to food inequality, they face systemic discrimination, sociocultural barriers, limited access to resources, and exclusion from the decision-making process/power. These factors contribute to and exacerbate women, and marginalized, ethnic groups' vulnerability to food security (Ghale et al., 2018).

The NDHS 2022 report further highlights significant socioeconomic and ethnic variations concerning anemia. Anemia rates are markedly elevated in socioeconomically marginalized communities, such as Muslim (50.0 percent) and Madhesi (48.4 percent) women, Dalit (36.3 percent), Janajati (31.4 percent), while Brahmin/Chhetri women exhibit the lowest prevalence (26.0 percent). These findings underscore the intersection of age, gender, geography, and related inequalities that create a complex web of poverty and vulnerability in Nepal. Children, and marginalized groups, including women and Dalits in rural and mountainous regions bear the brunt of these intersecting inequalities the most.

## **Bridging Gaps: Institutional Efforts in Combating Food and Hunger Inequality in Nepal**

In Nepal, a range of institutions- including federal, provincial, and local governments, development partners, and local community groups- play vital yet uneven roles in tackling food security and inequality. The federal government has introduced key frameworks such as the Agricultural Development Strategy (ADS) 2015-2035 and the National Food and Nutrition Security Plan (NFNSP), but these initiatives often face delays in implementation, insufficient funding, and limited attention to marginalized groups like Dalits and Indigenous communities (MoALD, 2021). Provincial governments, while having the potential to address region-specific needs, often lack the capacity and resources to execute programs effectively. Local governments, despite being closer to communities and better positioned to identify local challenges, are hindered by technical and financial constraints that limit their ability to deliver large-scale solutions (NPC, 2020). Development partners, such as the WFP and FAO, provide crucial support, especially in remote and underserved areas, but their efforts can be fragmented and not always aligned with national priorities (WFP, 2022). Local groups, including NGOs and community-based organizations, have shown success in grassroots initiatives like farmer cooperatives and agroecology projects, but they often struggle with limited funding and poor coordination with larger institutions (FAO, 2018). Major challenges include

weak coordination among institutions, unequal access to services, and inadequate measures to address the impacts of climate change on food systems. To enhance effectiveness, a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach is essential, focusing on building local capacity, targeting support for marginalized groups, promoting climate-resilient agricultural practices, and ensuring adequate funding with strong accountability mechanisms (UNDP, 2020).

## Causes of Food and Hunger Inequality in Nepal: Major Drivers

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Over the past two decades, Nepal has made notable strides in addressing hunger, as reflected in its Global Hunger Index (GHI) report, which has improved from an “alarming” level in 2000 to a “moderate” level by 2024. However, the underlying figures behind the 2024 GHI reveal persistent challenges. According to Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe (2024), 5.7 percent of the population remains undernourished, 24.9 percent of children under five are stunted, 7.0 percent are wasted, and 2.7 percent do not survive past their fifth birthday. While the overall index reflects progress, these indicators point to continuing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Food and hunger in Nepal, therefore, cannot be viewed through a single lens. They are deeply interconnected with broader systems- such as climate, health, economy, politics, geography, and socio-cultural structures- making the issues inherently complex and multidimensional (Clapp et al., 2022). To understand food and hunger inequality drivers, the following sections explore the countries' structural and social dimensions.

### Regional Inequality

Nepal's vertical geography creates natural food inequalities between the mountains and Terai regions. The Census 2021 shows approximately 83 percent of Nepal's land comprises hills and mountains where only 46 percent of the country's population reside, whereas, on the other hand covering only 17 percent of the country's total land area, the Terai region carries 54 percent of the country's total population. The largest share of agriculture production comes from the country's Terai region (3.5 MT/ha rice yield), whereas the other two ecological belts, the Hills and Mountains account for 2.1 MT/ha, and 1.3 MT/ha respectively (MoALD, 2023). Hills and Mountains, as stated, have less arable land and are more difficult to transport goods through, posing a challenge to access the market equally. The World Bank (2021) report states, the market access inequality between Terai households as compared to mountain districts is 78 percent vs. 22 percent. The land, population imbalance, and market accessibility relating to moderate or severe food insecurity and severe food insecurity are also reflected in the NDHS 2022 report. The percentage of moderate or severe food insecurity in mountain, hill, and Terai is 21.3, 11.8, and 12.0, respectively, whereas, the percentage of severe food insecurity in mountain, hill, and Terai is 3.2, 1.3, 1.1, respectively.

### Economic Inequality

Along with regional inequalities, economic inequality, and poverty are one of the major causes of food and hunger inequality in Nepal. The Nepal Living Standard Survey-IV (2022-23) report reveals that 20.27 percent of the population in Nepal is living below the poverty line, and the incidence of poverty is higher in rural areas (24.66 percent) than in urban areas (18.34 percent) (NSO, 2024).



According to the report, the country's Sudurpashchim Province recorded the highest poverty rate at 34.16 percent followed by Karnali Province at 26.69 percent, Lumbini Province at 24.35 percent and the lowest in Gandaki Province at 11.88 percent. Likewise, the Nepal Multidimensional Poverty Index Report 2021 shows 12.3 percent of people in urban regions as multidimensionally poor, compared to 28 percent of rural residents. MPI poverty in Karnali Province is highest at 39.5 percent, followed by 25.3 percent in Sudurpashchim Province, 24.2 in Madesh Province, 7.0 percent in Bagmati Province, and the least 2.96 percent in Gandaki Province, (NPC, 2021).

The relationship between multidimensional poverty and food insecurity in Nepal is evident across various demographic and geographic factors. Rural areas experience significantly higher poverty levels (28 percent) compared to urban areas (12.3 percent), which aligns with food insecurity rates- 16.2 percent of the rural population faces moderate or severe food insecurity, compared to 10.6 percent in urban regions. Similarly, when examining ecological zones, the mountain region shows the highest levels of deprivation, with 21.3 percent experiencing food insecurity, while the hill and Terai regions report lower figures at 11.9 percent and 12 percent, respectively. This trend is further reflected in province-wise data, where Karnali Province, with the highest multidimensional poverty index (MPI) at 39.5 percent, also records the most severe food insecurity (31.5 percent). Provinces like Sudurpashchim and Madesh, which also rank high in MPI, exhibit similarly high levels of food insecurity. In contrast, Gandaki Province, which has the lowest MPI (2.96 percent), also reports the least food insecurity (7.9 percent). The data suggests a clear link between economic deprivation and food insecurity, particularly in rural, mountainous, and high-MPI provinces.

### Caste and Ethnicity

Nepal's caste system is also seen as one of the major drivers that perpetuates nutritional hierarchies, leading to ethnic and caste-based food marginalization. As stated earlier, the NDHS (2022) report states, that one in four children under the age of five experiences stunting, a sign of long-term undernutrition. This deep-rooted caste and ethnic hierarchies continue to shape access to food and nutrition inequality in Nepal. Children from Dalit communities face a much higher rate of stunting- 34 percent- compared to just 19 percent among children from Brahmin families (UNICEF, 2023). Similarly, Indigenous communities, or Janajatis, have significantly less dietary diversity- 27 percent lower than dominant caste groups (FAO, 2022). Gender, caste, as well as household wealth further intersect to widen nutritional gaps. For instance, Dalit women consume 15 percent fewer calories on average than men from higher castes, highlighting both gender and caste-based food deprivation (IIDS, 2021). Likewise, stunting is nearly threefold higher among children from the lowest wealth quintile (37 percent) than among children from the highest wealth quintile (13 percent).

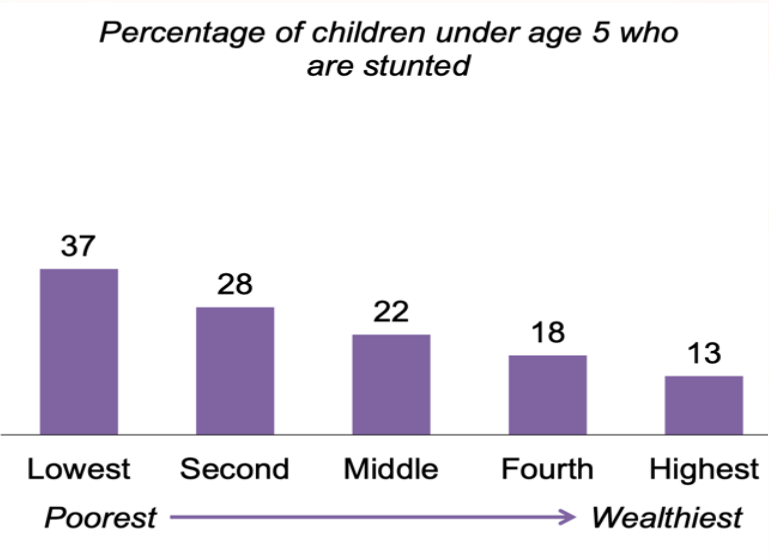


Figure 7. Stunting Children in Children by Household Wealth



## Age

Children's nutritional status also varies significantly across regions. In Nepal, one in four children under the age of five experiences stunting, a sign of long-term undernutrition. This issue is more widespread in rural areas, where 31 percent of children are stunted, compared to 22 percent in urban areas. Looking at different ecological zones, stunting affects 22 percent of children in the hill region, and 25 percent in the Terai, and rises sharply to 42 percent in the mountain areas. The likelihood of stunting decreases as the mother's level of education and household wealth increases. Wasting, which reflects acute malnutrition, affects 8 percent of children under five. Additionally, 19 percent of children in this age group are underweight. In contrast, only 1 percent of young children in Nepal are considered overweight.

## Gender

Gender discrimination is also one of the underlying causes of food inequality and undernutrition in Nepal (MoALD et al., 2018 as cited in Chemjong et al., 2020). From a gender perspective, women play a central role in the food system and are integral components in the cultivation of food crops, food production, food consumption, and related activities. In Nepal, women make up at least 67 percent of the agricultural workforce, compared to 27 percent of men. However, 'their power sharing in production resources and leadership in different institutional architecture is under-represented' (NPC, 2021b). The existing gender inequalities and social and cultural discriminatory practices influence inequity in terms of access to production resource governance, access to employment and incomes, inclusive leadership, and equitable access to food by all, resulting in women, smallholders, and the poor being further pushed to risks of vulnerabilities in securing nutritious and adequate food (NPC, 2021b). Socioeconomic marginalization, poverty, and small landholdings-increases the vulnerability of Nepali households to climate-induced food insecurity, indicating that climate change leads to differential impacts within Nepal (Gautam and Andersen, 2017) as cited in Randell et al., 2021. Despite the constitutional guarantee for equality and the right to food for all as a fundamental right, food insecurity still exists and food insecurity prevalence is higher in women than in men.

## Climate

Likewise, climate irregularities have significantly impacted agriculture, livelihood, and various aspects of life in Nepal. Though the Climate Risk Index (CRI) 2025 ranks Nepal at the 69<sup>th</sup> position, assessing countries most affected by extreme weather events due to climate change over the past three decades (1993-2022), the country faces high risks from natural disasters like floods, landslides, and earthquakes. Food is intricately intertwined with agriculture, and Nepal's agriculture is primarily rainfed. Rainfed agriculture in Nepal accounts for 65 percent of the total cultivatable land area with only 24 percent of the arable land being irrigated (mainly in the lowland Terai). These climate dependent factors result in significantly low crop productivity compared to the rest of South Asia, making the country heavily reliant on food imports (Bartlett et al., 2010 as cited in Kattel et al., 2022). The country is also predicted to experience a food production (rice, wheat, and cereal grains) decline by 2030 because of climate change (Randell et al., 2021).

## Political Structural and Institutional

Structural and institutional inequality is also one of the major drivers relating to food and hunger inequality in Nepal. Despite the presence of various food and nutrition programs (explained below), policies in Nepal often fail to reach the most marginalized communities. Disaster relief, food subsidies, and nutrition initiatives are not always distributed fairly or implemented effectively, leaving large gaps in support for those who need it most.

Well-meaning efforts can sometimes make inequalities worse. For example, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, designed to support school children, only reaches 68 percent of its target schools. Within that, Dalit students are 30 percent less likely to benefit (DoE, 2023). Similarly, food banks- meant to serve vulnerable populations- are mostly based in urban areas, with 82 percent located in cities (WFP, 2023). Climate adaptation funding also shows a skewed pattern, with 73 percent of the resources spent in easier-to-reach hill districts, rather than the more vulnerable mountain regions (MoFE, 2024).

Government actions can sometimes reinforce these divides. Agricultural subsidies, for instance, disproportionately benefit the wealthy- 72 percent go to the top 15 percent of landowners (MoF, 2023). The Prime Minister's "Food for All" program, meant to reduce hunger, only reaches 31 percent of Dalit families living in the mountains (WFP, 2023). Urban bias is another major issue. In Kathmandu, supermarkets stock imported items, while in remote districts like Karnali, families survive on wild nettle soup for three months each year (UNICEF, 2022).

## Data Gaps

Finally, gaps in data also contribute to inequality. National surveys often group people broadly under categories like "hill residents," without recognizing differences between castes or locations- hiding key inequalities, such as between a Dalit in Jumla and a Brahmin in the same district. These patterns show how structural and institutional systems continue to deepen food inequality, particularly for those already on the margins.

To conclude, food and hunger inequality in Nepal is not a matter of food shortage alone, but of who has access to it, and under what conditions. Despite improvements in GHI levels, the everyday experience of hunger is shaped by geography, caste, gender, and wealth. A child's chance of being nourished still depends on whether she/he are born in the mountains or the Terai, in a Dalit or a Brahmin household, in a poor village or a better-off city. Government programs, while important, often fall short of reaching the most excluded.

## Nepal's Food Security and Nutrition Policies: Policy Gaps and Challenges

Ensuring food security has always been a key national policy in Nepal. The history of policies on food regulation in the country dates back to 1961. The institutional initiative on regulating food in Nepal began after the establishment of the Department of Food in 1961 (Khanal et al., 2023). However, the regulation of food in Nepal began in 1966 by enforcing the Food Act, followed by



the Food Regulation of 1970, and the formulation of the Food Safety Policy in 2019 (Khanal et al., 2023). Along with current Constitutional provisions and the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, which considers food as a fundamental right, the country has numerous policies, plans, strategies, and programs related to food and nutrition security. Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) (2015-2035), Agro-biodiversity Policy (2007), Dairy Development Policy (2007), Trade Policy (2009), National Agricultural Policy (2004), Multi-sectoral Nutrition Plan (MSNP) I and II, National Seed Policy (2000), Agri-business Promotion Policy (2006), Nepal Food Security Monitoring System (NeKSAP), Agriculture and Food Security Project (AFSP) (2013-2018), National Nutrition Policy and Strategy (2004), the Fifteenth Plan (2019-2024), National Nutrition Strategy (2020), Food and Nutrition Security Plan (2013), Nepal Zero Hunger Challenge National Action Plan (2016-2025) etc., are some of the policies, strategies, act and strategic plans to improve food security in Nepal. For instance, the National Nutrition Policy and Strategy (2004) sets a clear objective to improve household food security to ensure that all people have adequate access, availability, and utilization of food needed for a healthy life; the Fifteenth Plan (2019-2024) and National Nutrition Strategy (2020) also focus on increasing the availability, accessibility, and quality of nutritious food to all people (Adhikari et al., 2023). Similarly, the Multisector Nutrition Plans (2013-2017, 2018–2022, and 2023-2030); 28<sup>th</sup> National Agriculture Policy (2004), and Food and Nutrition Security Plan (2013) promote food security by making provisions for increasing the availability, accessibility, and consumption of nutritious foods (Adhikari et al., 2023).

The government is also committed to achieving internationally agreed-upon World Health Assembly global nutrition targets by 2025 and Goal 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals on zero hunger by the year 2030. Hence, to achieve the goal the government has formulated five multi-sectoral Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) policies making a major contribution to the SDG 2 mandate (NPC, 2018). The table below shows the five major FSN policies of Nepal and their relation to SDG 2.

**Table 2. Food Security and Nutrition policies related to SDG 2**

Policy	Goal	Contribution to SDG2	Remarks
Agricultural Development Strategy (2015-2035)	Commercialization and diversification of agriculture, sustainable agricultural growth, and poverty reduction	End hunger and increase access for all people including the poor, vulnerable, and infants to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food (2.1), increase agricultural productivity (2.3), and sustainable food production systems (2.4)	Replaced APP (1995-2015), a multi-sector strategy with four outcomes and 13 outputs
Food and Nutrition Security Plan of Action (FNSP) (2013-2022FNSP20132022)	Ensure national FSN with a specific focus on the agricultural sector	Strategic food security interventions and contribution to all SDG2 targets	Prepared in conjunction with the ADS and MSNP



Nepal Zero Hunger Challenge (2016-2025)		End hunger and enhance rights-based access to FSN	Provide short and long-term solutions to achieve sustainable as well as inclusive food system development, contribute to all SDG2 targets	Complementary to ADS, FNSP, and MSNP
Nepal Health Sector Strategy (2016-2021)	Sec- (NHSS)	Improve the health of all people through an accountable and equitable health service delivery system	Contribute to ending all forms of malnutrition (2.2)	Adopts the vision and the mission set forth by the National Health Policy 2014 and strengthens multi-sectoral plans including the MSNP
Multisector Plan	Nutrition	Accelerate the reduction of maternal, adolescent, and child undernutrition	Contribute to end all forms of malnutrition (2.2)	Part of the global Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) movement and is committed to improving the nutrition status of its citizens
2018-2022				

**Source:** National Planning Commission (2018)

Based on Table 2, it is evident that there is no paucity of policy and institutional measures in Nepal aimed at ensuring food security and improving nutritional outcomes. Nevertheless, policy coherence and implementation present a challenge (NPC, 2018). Also, the policy incoherence has not been well documented in the literature, and the evidence is limited as to what extent the existing food and nutritional policies address current and future nutritional concerns. Though the FSN policies directly or indirectly address food security concerns, they are not adequate to deal with the comprehensive gender dimensions of the food system (Ghale et al., 2018). Also, adequate implementation and prolonged delays in formulating new policies, regulations, and approaches are questionable with a lack of strict monitoring and feedback mechanisms (Khanal et al., 2023). For instance, the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act nearly took five years to develop, thus impeding crucial provisions such as identifying food insecure households and formulating a national food plan.

Likewise, Nepal's transition to the Federal Republic has brought both challenges and opportunities in relation to coordinating food security policy (NPC and WFP, 2019). After the promulgation of the Constitution in 2015, local governments have the mandate to provide services and represent people, however, lack of coordination and the implementation of national policies or sometimes unfair competition and conflict between local and federal levels has caused violations of the Right to Food. Undoubtedly, federalism has made citizens feel closer to the (local) government because of the policies' flexibility on local needs, however, coordinating food security and nutrition policies have not been easy.

Also, the realization of the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty in Nepal is increasingly hampered by a weak rights-based framework, diminishing political commitment during constitutional implementation, and the absence of formalized indicators to track progress toward fulfilling

legal guarantees (Chapagai, 2024). Hence, coherent enabling environment- one that consists of policy commitment and cohesive coordination, robust capacity, sound data monitoring systems, and accountability- is key to ensuring “no one is left behind” in the context of Food Security and Nutrition in Nepal.

## Conclusion

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Food and hunger inequality in Nepal reveals a stark reality where notable progress coexists with persistent challenges. Over the past decade, Nepal has made measurable progress in improving key food security and nutrition indicators such as its Global Hunger Index ranking, reducing multidimensional poverty, and lowering the prevalence of child stunting. However, the country continues to face significant inequalities in food security, particularly among vulnerable and marginalized communities. The data show that while national averages suggest moderate improvements, significant gaps remain-especially between urban and rural areas, and among the mountain, hill, and Terai regions and across provinces. For instance, rural and mountainous regions, such as Karnali Province, experience disproportionately high levels of food insecurity compared to urban areas. Also, limited agricultural productivity, inadequate and/or poor infrastructure, and challenging terrain in these regions hinder the physical and economic accessibility of nutritious food.

Moreover, the study underscores the interplay between food insecurity and broader social inequalities. Gender inequalities, socio-economic marginalization, and caste-based discrimination act as systemic barriers to accessing nutritious food and promoting equality, further exacerbating the vulnerability.

Nepal has also made commendable progress in reducing stunting and improving food availability; however, significant gaps remain in ensuring equitable access to food. The country's continuous reliance on food imports, coupled with inefficiencies in food distribution systems, has led to inequalities in food accessibility, particularly for low-income households. Moreover, the gendered dimensions of food insecurity, where women often have limited control over food production and consumption decisions, further complicate efforts to achieve food security for all.

Nepal's transition to a federal system has introduced both opportunities and challenges in addressing food insecurity. While local governments now have greater autonomy to address food security issues, the lack of coordination between federal and local levels has hindered the effective implementation of national policies. Additionally, the absence of robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms has limited the impact of existing food security initiatives.

In conclusion, while Nepal has made significant strides in addressing food security and nutrition inequality, the country remains far from achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of Zero Hunger by 2030. Hence, it is imperative to call for a more integrated and inclusive approach to food security, one that addresses the root causes of inequality, strengthens policy coherence, and ensures that no one is left behind. This includes prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable populations, enhancing climate and disaster resilience in agriculture, strengthening infrastructures, and promoting gender equity in food systems. Only through sustained and coordinated efforts can Nepal hope to overcome the persistent challenges of food insecurity and build a more equitable and sustainable food system for all its citizens.



## Recommendations

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- ***Prioritizing resource allocation to geographically disadvantaged areas***

Since mountains and rural regions face disproportionately higher levels of food and hunger inequality due to geographic isolation, poor infrastructure, and limited arable land, the report recommends developing and implementing equity-based public investment frameworks to ensure greater allocation of food security resources to the mountain and remote regions. This includes expanding infrastructure for market access, irrigation, and cold storage in high-MPI areas like Karnali and Sudurpaschim.

- ***Implementing affirmative food justice programs for marginalized castes and ethnic groups***

From the historical past Dalits, Indigenous communities, and Madhesi populations have faced systemic exclusion from food access and nutrition programs, the report recommends the establishment of affirmative action schemes in food subsidy, nutrition services, and agricultural grants specifically targeting historically marginalized communities, backed by disaggregated data collection on caste and ethnicity to guide program delivery.

- ***Gender-responsive food systems transformation***

Studies show that women comprise 67 percent of the agricultural workforce, still, they lack decision-making power and adequate access to food production resources, recommendations are to mandate gender quotas in agricultural cooperatives, food committees, and subsidy boards. Scaling up gender-specific agricultural credit, training, and land leasing programs to ensure women's agency and leadership in food systems is also recommended.

- ***Reformation of unequal agricultural subsidy structures***

Study reports show that 72 percent of agricultural subsidies go to the top 15 percent of landowners, exacerbating wealth-based food inequality. Hence, it is recommended that the existing unequal agricultural subsidy structures mechanism be redesigned using a pro-poor and smallholder-first framework that prioritizes subsistence farmers and landless laborers.

- ***Development of a federal food equity index***

There is stark inequality between regions and social groups at the national level, hence, the report recommends the establishment of a Food Equity Index at federal and provincial levels, disaggregated by geography, gender, caste, wealth, and ecological zones, to measure food and nutrition access inequality. Hence, use the index to prioritize interventions.

- ***Localization of climate-resilient agriculture in high-inequality zones***

Climate shocks repeatedly and disproportionately have been affecting mountain and hill communities with poor adaptive capacity. Hence, the recommendation would be to invest in agroecological, climate-resilient farming practices tailored to ecological zones and marginalized communities.



- ***Ensuring equitable implementation of rights-based food laws***

Though the Constitution and the Right to Food Act guarantee every individual the right to food, these rights are not equitably realized. Hence, the development of province-specific operational plans to implement the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, with a focus on reaching those left behind- Dalits, mountain residents, women, and the urban poor with legal aid services supporting marginalized communities in claiming these rights, is strongly recommended.

- ***Decentralization and democratization of food aid and nutrition programs:***

A large number of food and nutrition programs are urban-centric and hardly reach the most excluded, hence it is recommended that such programs be targeted to rural Dalit-dominated, and mountain districts, using equity mapping tools. It is also recommended that such programs ensure Dalit and Janajati children are included through proactive outreach and culturally appropriate delivery mechanisms.

- ***Institutionalizing accountability and monitoring for food inequality:***

Most of the food and hunger programs do not meet the targets due to implementation gaps, and these gaps persist due to weak monitoring and lack of rights-based tracking, hence, it is recommended that the country creates an independent Food and Nutrition Inequality Watchdog Body under the National Planning Commission to monitor inequality outcomes of food programs and recommend course corrections.

- ***Integrating intersectionality into all food and nutrition policies:***

Nepal's food and hunger programs and policies often seem to ignore the intersection of caste, gender, geography, and poverty; hence, the recommendation would be to mandate all new food and nutrition-related policies undergo an "Inequality Impact Assessment" to assess how interventions will affect the most marginalized. Also, updating existing policies to reflect multidimensional inequalities is strongly recommended.











# Inequalities in Health

-Laxmi Tamang, MPH, PhD

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

Health inequalities, defined as avoidable and unjust differences in health status and outcomes across population subgroups (NHS England, 2023; WHO, 2017) pose a significant barrier to achieving health equity. These inequalities are rooted in the social determinants of health: the conditions in which individuals are born, grow, live, work, and age, profoundly shape both physical and mental well-being (WHO, 2019).

Effective monitoring of health inequalities is essential to identifying marginalized populations, guiding evidence-based policies, and advancing health equity. Universal Health Coverage (UHC), a cornerstone of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, aims to ensure that everyone has access to quality healthcare without financial hardship (NHRC, 2022). Achieving this goal requires robust national health information systems capable of measuring and addressing inequalities—ensuring no one is left behind.

## 1.2 Health Inequality in Nepal

In Nepal, health inequalities are deeply entrenched in historical, social, and economic injustices. The caste system, codified through the *Muluki Ain of 1854*, institutionalized discrimination that continues to marginalize vulnerable communities (Gurung et al., 2020; Bennett and Parajuli, 2013). Structural barriers—such as geographical isolation, poverty, and limited healthcare access—further exacerbate inequalities, particularly in remote and underserved regions (Khatri et al., 2024; NHRC, 2022; Pokharel et al., 2021; Ghimire et al., 2019).

Despite progress in income, education, and healthcare infrastructure, inequities persist. Wealthier groups consistently benefit more from health improvements, while poorer populations face persistent obstacles to accessing essential health services, resulting in poorer health outcomes. These inequalities—across social groups and geographic regions—undermine both individual well-being and broader national development.

Maternal and neonatal health starkly illustrate these inequalities. Nepal's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) decreased from 259 to 151 per 100,000 live births between 2016 and 2021. However, stark provincial and socio-economic inequalities remain. The neonatal mortality rate (NMR) has stagnated at 21 per 1,000 live births since 2016, with significant inequities: 31 per 1,000 among the poorest compared to 13 among the wealthiest. Institutional delivery rates also reflect inequality—rising from 11 percent to 67 percent among the poorest women between 2011 to 2022, compared to 78 percent to 98 percent among the wealthiest. Ethnic and regional differences are pronounced: Dalit (70 percent) and Madhesi (76 percent) women have lower institutional delivery rates than Brahmin/Chhetri women (87 percent), with Madhesh province recording the lowest rate (67 percent) in 2022.

These inequalities underscore the urgent need for targeted, equity-focused policies that prioritize marginalized populations. Strengthening maternal and newborn health services, addressing socioeconomic and geographic inequities, and ensuring inclusive healthcare delivery are critical to realizing health for all.



## 2. Global and Regional Context

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Health inequalities remain a pervasive global challenge, disproportionately affecting Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) due to entrenched socio-economic inequalities, gender-based inequities, and under-resourced healthcare systems. The life expectancy gap between the richest and poorest countries exceeds 18 years, with preventable diseases and unequal access to quality care continuing to cost millions of lives (WHO, 2023). Maternal and child mortality starkly illustrate these inequalities—Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia account for 86 percent of global maternal deaths, with South Asia exhibiting profound inequalities across income, gender, and geography (UNICEF, 2022).

The global and regional discourse increasingly recognizes the structural drivers of health inequality. Economic policies, governance models, and healthcare financing systems that prioritize profit over public welfare exacerbate inequities. The legacy of colonial exploitation, neoliberal privatization, and structural adjustment programs imposed by international financial institutions has systematically weakened public health systems in many LMICs. Additionally, restrictive trade policies and intellectual property laws hinder access to affordable essential medicines, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable.

South Asia, home to nearly 2 billion people, epitomizes these systemic health inequalities. Despite economic growth, widespread gaps in healthcare access, nutrition, and sanitation persist across and within countries (World Bank, 2021). In India, the under-five mortality rate stands at 28 per 1,000 live births, but it rises sharply in rural and tribal areas, while Pakistan's maternal mortality rate remains at 58 per 100,000 live births, with vast provincial differences (World Bank, 2022; MoHFW India, 2023, UNICEF, 2025). In Bangladesh, 31 percent of children under five suffer from stunting due to poverty and food insecurity (Global Nutrition Report, 2022). In Nepal, the poorest women are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than their wealthiest counterparts (UNFPA, 2023).

While the region made notable strides in reducing maternal and child mortality, it now faces a dual burden of disease. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular conditions are rising among low-income populations, driven by urbanization, unhealthy diets, and sedentary lifestyles—while infectious diseases tied to poverty, poor sanitation, and inadequate infrastructure persist (WHO, 2021). Healthcare access remains deeply unequal: in Pakistan, only 36 percent of rural households have access to basic sanitation, with dire consequences for public health (World Bank, 2021). Gender inequalities further compound the issue girls in South Asia are 30 percent less likely than boys to receive full immunization (UN Women, 2023).

These trends reflect that health inequalities are not solely the result of national policy failures—they are symptoms of global economic and political structures that perpetuate unequal access to healthcare and the right to health. For countries like Nepal, local barriers such as poverty, remoteness, and social exclusion are magnified by global asymmetries in wealth, power, and resources. Addressing health inequality, therefore, requires not just national reforms, but a global commitment to equity, justice, and the redistribution of opportunities and resources.

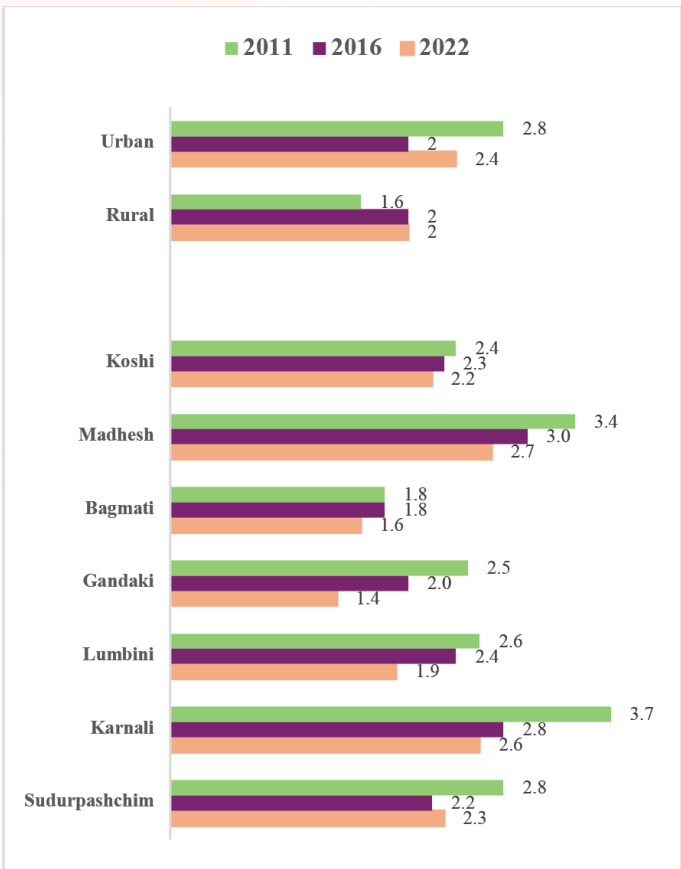
### 3. Unveiling Health Inequalities in Nepal?

Nepal's Constitution (Article 35) and the Public Health Service Act of 2018 guarantee every citizen the right to basic health services and commit the state to ensuring equitable healthcare for all (GoN, 2015; GoN, 2018). However, a comprehensive analysis of key health indicators—including fertility, family planning, maternal and child health, nutrition, hypertension, and domestic violence—reveals entrenched inequalities across caste/ethnicity, geographic location, province, and economic status (see Table 1-13 in Annex I). These inequalities highlight the urgent need for targeted policies and equity-driven interventions to fulfil the constitutional promise for health for all.

#### 3.1 Fertility

Fertility is a critical demographic and health indicator with implications for population growth and reproductive rights. Nepal's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) declined from 2.6 in 2011 to 2.1 in 2022, indicating progress toward replacement-level fertility (Ministry of Health and Population [Nepal] et al., 2023). This trend reflects improvements in reproductive health, education, and economic development (Annex I, Table 1).

Yet stark inequalities persist. Muslim women continue to have the highest fertility rates—though declining from 5.0 to 3.3—while Dalits (3.2 to 2.4) and Terai Madhesi Other groups (3.4 to 2.4) remain above the national average. In contrast, Brahmin/Chhetri (2.0) and Janajati (1.8) groups have achieved or surpassed replacement levels, widening intergroup inequalities.



**Figure 1:** Total fertility rate by place of residence and province, 2011–2022

Rural fertility remains higher than urban (2.4 vs. 2.0), reflecting unequal access to reproductive health services and persistent gender inequities. Provincial differences are also striking: Madhesh (2.7) and Karnali (2.6) report the highest fertility rates, linked to poverty and lower female education, while Bagmati (1.6) and Gandaki (1.4) have the lowest (Figure 1), benefiting from urbanization and economic development.

Wealth-based inequalities are particularly pronounced. Although fertility among the poorest declined from 4.1 to 2.8, it remains significantly higher than among the richest, whose TFR stayed constant at 1.6. These gaps underscore persistent barriers to reproductive autonomy for marginalized groups, reinforcing cycles of poverty and gender inequality. Urgent, equity-focused interventions are needed to address these inequalities and ensure reproductive justice for all.



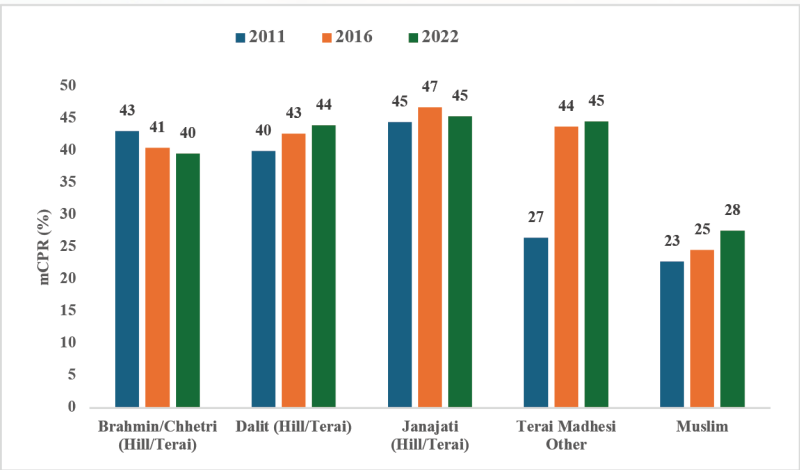
### 3.2 Family Planning

Access to family planning is a constitutionally guaranteed right in Nepal, reinforced by the Public Health Service Act (2018), the Right to Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Act (2018), and related national policies and strategies. These frameworks prioritize high-quality, client-centered FP services for marginalized populations, aiming to reach the SDG target of 60 percent contraceptive use by 2030 (NPC 2023).

Family planning is a proven life-saving intervention—it prevents unintended pregnancies, reduces high-risk births, and improves maternal and child health. Research shows that spacing births by at least two years can reduce maternal mortality by 30 percent and child mortality by 10 percent (Prata et al., 2011). Ensuring voluntary, equitable access to FP services is essential to breaking cycles of poverty and advancing gender equality.

#### 3.2.1 Use of Modern Contraceptive Methods

Nepal's modern contraceptive prevalence rate (mCPR) among currently married women (15–49 years) has remained nearly stagnant at 43 percent from 2011 to 2022, concealing persistent inequalities across caste, residence, province, and wealth (Annex I, Table 2). While usage among Dalit, Terai Madhesi and Muslim women has gradually improved, Brahmin/Chhetri and Janajati groups have seen declines (Figure 2), possibly reflecting shifting fertility preferences or reduced access to services. Surprisingly, rural contraceptive use now exceeds urban (47 percent vs. 41 percent), with urban areas experiencing sharp drop, possibly due to service delivery gaps or evolving reproductive choices.



**Figure 2:** Percentage of modern contraceptive prevalence rate by caste/ethnicity, 2011-2022

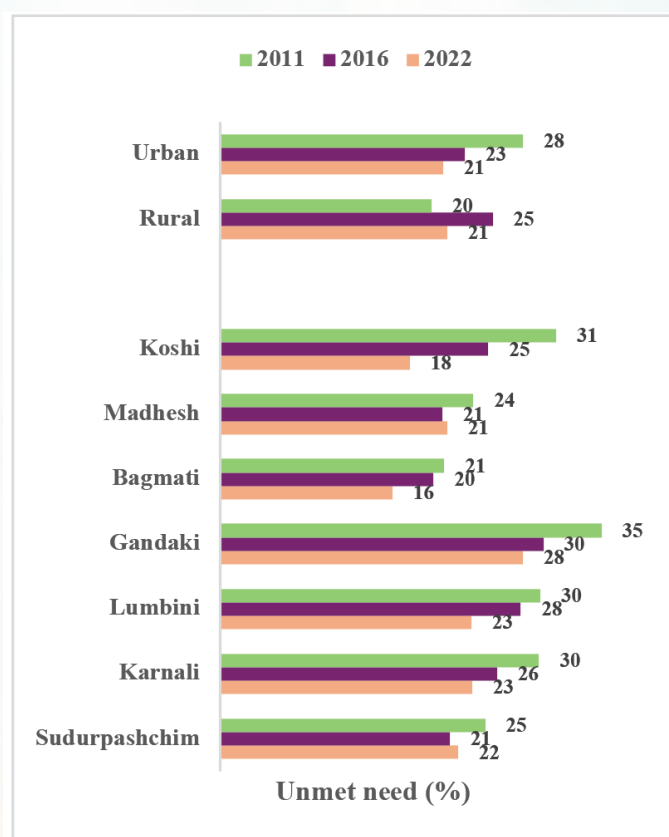
Provincial trends show diverging patterns—Bagmati and Gandaki recorded sharp declines, while Karnali and Koshi showed notable gains. The poorest women made significant progress, with mCPR rising from 36 percent to 45 percent, whereas the wealthiest experienced a decline from 49 percent to 39 percent, possibly indicating increased reliance on alternative fertility strategies.

These shifts demand targeted, equity-focused approaches to ensure all women—particularly those in underserved communities—can access high-quality, voluntary FP services. Strengthening service delivery, addressing sociocultural barriers, and ensuring sustained investment are critical to achieving Nepal's FP and SDG goals.

#### 3.2.2 Unmet Need

Between 2011 and 2022, the overall unmet need for family planning among currently married women aged 15–49 declined from 28 percent to 21 percent, reflecting improved access and awareness. Yet significant inequalities remain (Annex I, Table 2).





**Figure 3:** Unmet need for family planning by place of residence and province, 2011–2022

Muslim women continue to report the highest unmet need—though reduced from 39 percent to 25 percent—indicating persistent sociocultural barriers. Dalit women also saw a decrease (31 percent to 26 percent) but remain above the national average, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

Geographic inequalities persist. While rural areas saw a drop in unmet need from 28 percent to 21 percent, urban areas recorded a slight increase, rising from 20 percent to 21 percent (Figure 3). This may lead to growing service delivery gaps in urban settings. Karnali (23 percent) and Gandaki (28 percent) Provinces still report high levels of unmet need, in contrast to Bagmati, which has the lowest at 16 percent, highlighting provincial inequalities in healthcare access and infrastructure.

Wealth-based inequalities are equally stark: in 2022, the poorest women had an unmet need of 25 percent, compared to just 17 percent among the wealthiest. These figures illustrate the

impact of economic status on reproductive health outcomes.

Addressing these inequalities requires culturally responsive, geographically targeted, and equity-focused family planning programs to ensure that all women—regardless of background—can exercise their reproductive rights fully and freely.

### 3.3 Utilization of Maternal Health Services

Access to quality healthcare during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period is vital for the health and survival of both mothers and newborns. Nepal has made notable strides in maternal health, nearly halving the pregnancy-related mortality ratio from 239 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2016 to 151 in 2021. The current ratio stands at 158 (MoHP and NSO, 2022). Despite these gains, achieving the national SDG target of 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030 (NPC, 2023) demands renewed urgency, sustained investment, equitable service delivery, and targeted interventions—ensuring no woman is left behind.

#### 3.3.1 Four or more Antenatal Care (ANC) Visits

Antenatal care utilization has improved significantly, with 81 percent of women receiving at least four ANC visits in 2022—up from 50 percent in 2011 (Annex I, Table 3). This reflects a notable expansion in maternal health services. However, inequalities persist. Brahmin/Chhetri and Janajati women report the highest ANC coverage (90 percent and 84 percent, respectively), while Dalit (71 percent) and Terai Madhesi (73 percent) women remain underserved due to deep-rooted socio-economic and cultural barriers.

Encouragingly, rural areas have seen dramatic gains—from 48 percent in 2011 to 82 percent in 2022—narrowing the gap with urban areas (80 percent) (Figure 4). At the provincial level, Sudurpashchim (90 percent) and Bagmati (89 percent) show substantial progress, while Madhesh (68 percent) continues to struggle with service accessibility. Economic inequality is stark: 93 percent of the wealthiest women receive four ANC visits, compared to only 75 percent of the poorest.

While the upward trend is promising, universal access to quality ANC remains elusive for marginalized groups. Targeted, equity-driven strategies are essential to reduce maternal and newborn risks and ensure no woman is left behind.

### 3.3.2 Skill Attendance at Birth and Facility-based Delivery

The proportion of deliveries attended by skill providers has surged from 36 percent in 2011 to 80 percent in 2022 (Annex I, Table 4), marking a major achievement in maternal healthcare. Yet, inequalities across caste/ethnicity, geography, and income persist. Brahmin/Chhetri and Janajati women benefit the most (87 percent and 84 percent), while Dalit and Muslim women (both 71 percent) remain disadvantaged.

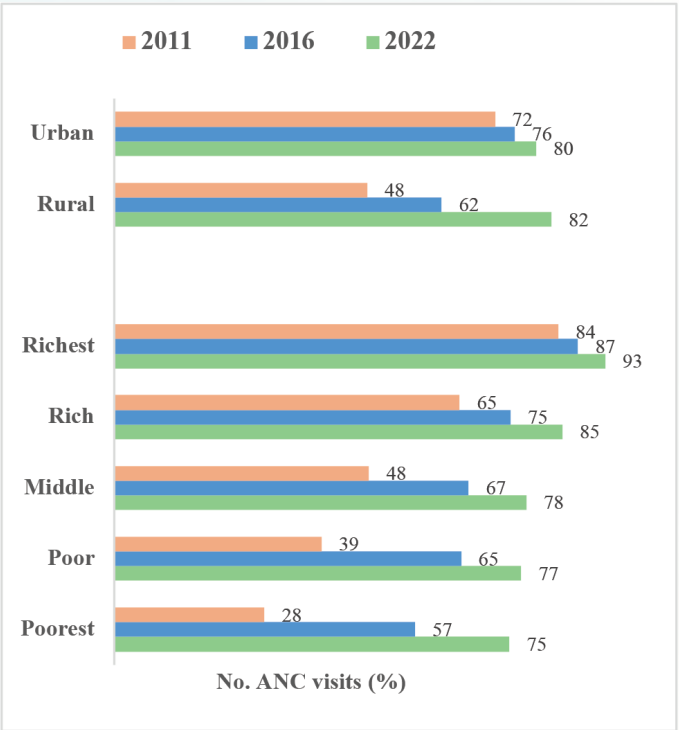


Figure 4: Four or more ANC visits by place of residence, and province, 2011-2022

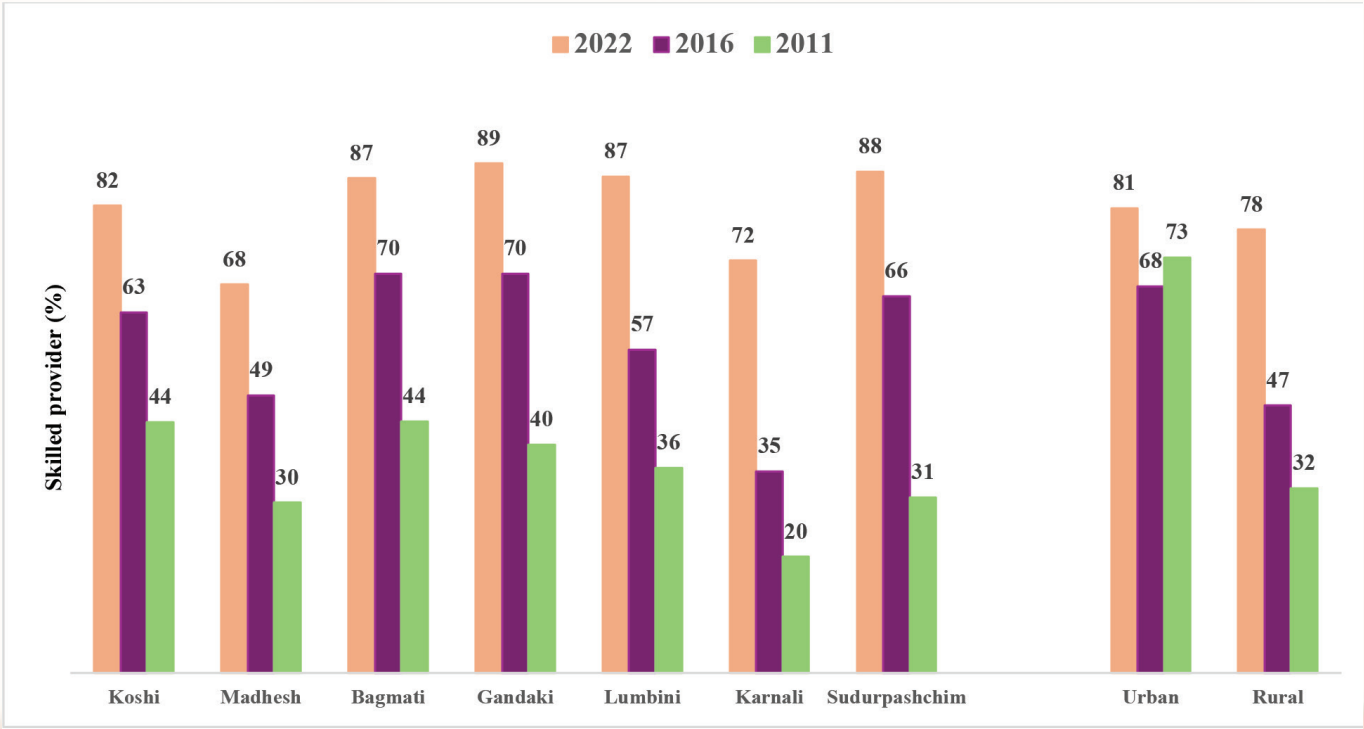
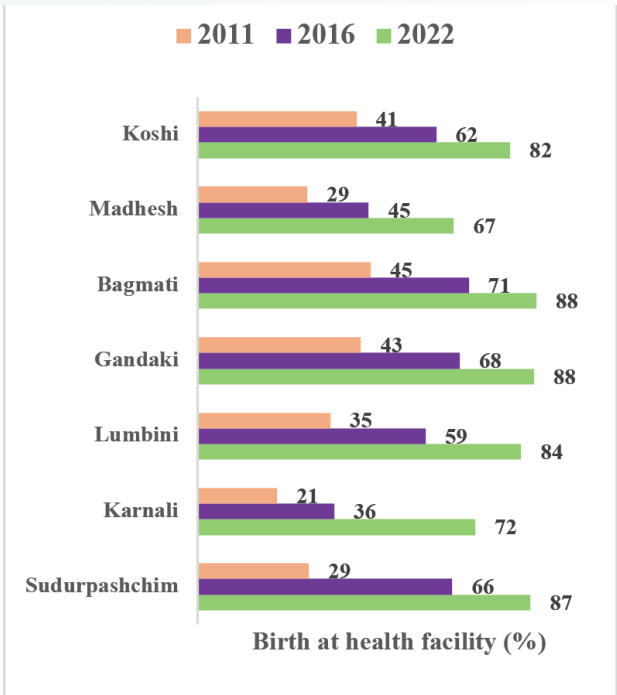


Figure 5: Trends in delivery assistance by skilled provider at birth by place of residence, and province, 2011-2022

Rural areas show dramatic progress, with coverage rising from 32 percent to 78 percent, nearly closing the gap with urban areas (81 percent) (Figure 5). Provincially, Gandaki (89 percent) and Sudurpashchim (88 percent) lead, while Madhesh lags at 68 percent. Economic inequalities are pronounced—only 67 percent of the poorest women receive skilled birth care compared to 97 percent of the wealthiest, underscoring financial and systemic barriers in healthcare access.

Similarly, health facility births have increased from 35 percent in 2011 to 79 percent in 2022 (Annex I, Table 4). Brahmin/Chhetri and Janajati women report high institutional delivery rates (87 percent and 83 percent), Dalit (70 percent) and Muslim (67 percent) women are left behind. Rural facility births rose sharply from 32 percent to 77 percent, yet still trail urban areas (81 percent). Bagmati and Gandaki lead (both at 88 percent), while Madhesh lags behind (67 percent) (Figure 6). Alarmingly, only 66 percent of the poorest women give birth in a facility compared to 98 percent of the richest.



**Figure 6:** Trends of health facility birth by province, 2011-2022

Despite remarkable national progress, equity gaps remain. Closing these inequalities requires inclusive, community driven, and financially accessible maternal health strategies—especially for marginalized and underserved populations.

### 3.3.3 Postnatal Care (PNC) for Mothers

Postnatal care is crucial, particularly within the first 24 to 48 hours after delivery, when the risk of maternal and newborn mortality is highest. Nepal's national PNC protocol recommends four checkups: within 24 hours (at a facility), on the third day (at home), between days 7–14 (at home), and on day 42 (at a facility). Ensuring adherence to these checkups is essential for preventing avoidable deaths.

Coverage of PNC within the first two days after birth improved from 45 percent in 2011 to 70 percent in 2022 (Annex I, Table 5), reflecting service enhancements. Yet inequality persists. Brahmin/Chhetri and Janajati women lead with 75 percent and 74 percent coverage, while Dalit and Terai Madhesi Other women trail at 64 percent. Rural uptake has grown from 42 percent to 68 percent, though it still lags behind urban rates (72 percent). Madhesh and Karnali report the lowest coverage (both at 58 percent), whereas Sudurpashchim (78 percent) and Koshi (77 percent) demonstrate strong progress.

The economic divide is striking, only 56 percent of the poorest women receive timely PNC compared to 87 percent of the richest. These gaps highlight the urgent need for policies that improve access to timely, quality PNC—especially among the poorest and most vulnerable groups.



### 3.4 Maternal Mortality

Maternal mortality remains a critical public health concern in Nepal, with stark inequalities across provinces. Lumbini and Karnali report the highest maternal mortality ratios (207 and 172 per 100,000 live births, respectively), while Bagmati has the lowest (98 per 100,000 live births) (Figure 7). These inequalities reflect the significant influence of women's socio-economic status on their survival during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period.

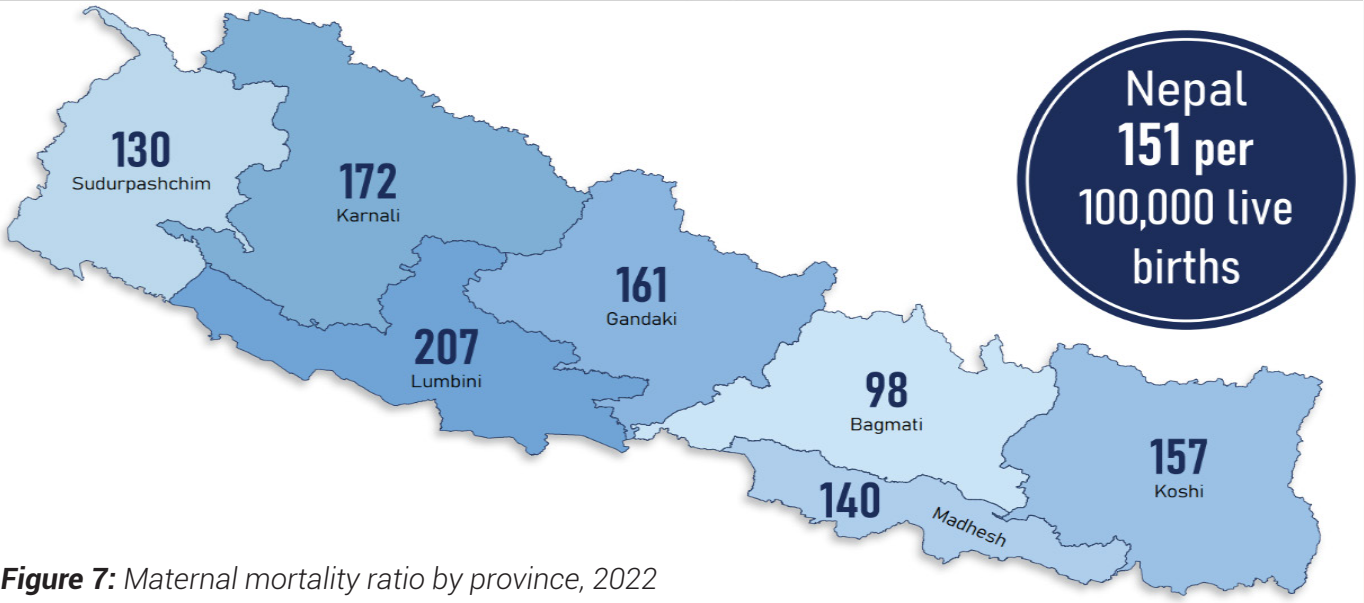


Figure 7: Maternal mortality ratio by province, 2022

The majority (62 percent) of maternal deaths occur during the postpartum period, exposing severe gaps in postnatal care and emergency response systems (Table 6, Annex I). This pattern is consistent across all provinces (Figure 8), signaling a national-level crisis in postpartum health services. Education emerges as a major determinant: women with no formal schooling or only primary education account for 38 percent of maternal deaths, while those with a bachelor's degree or higher make up only 6 percent (Annex I, Table 6).

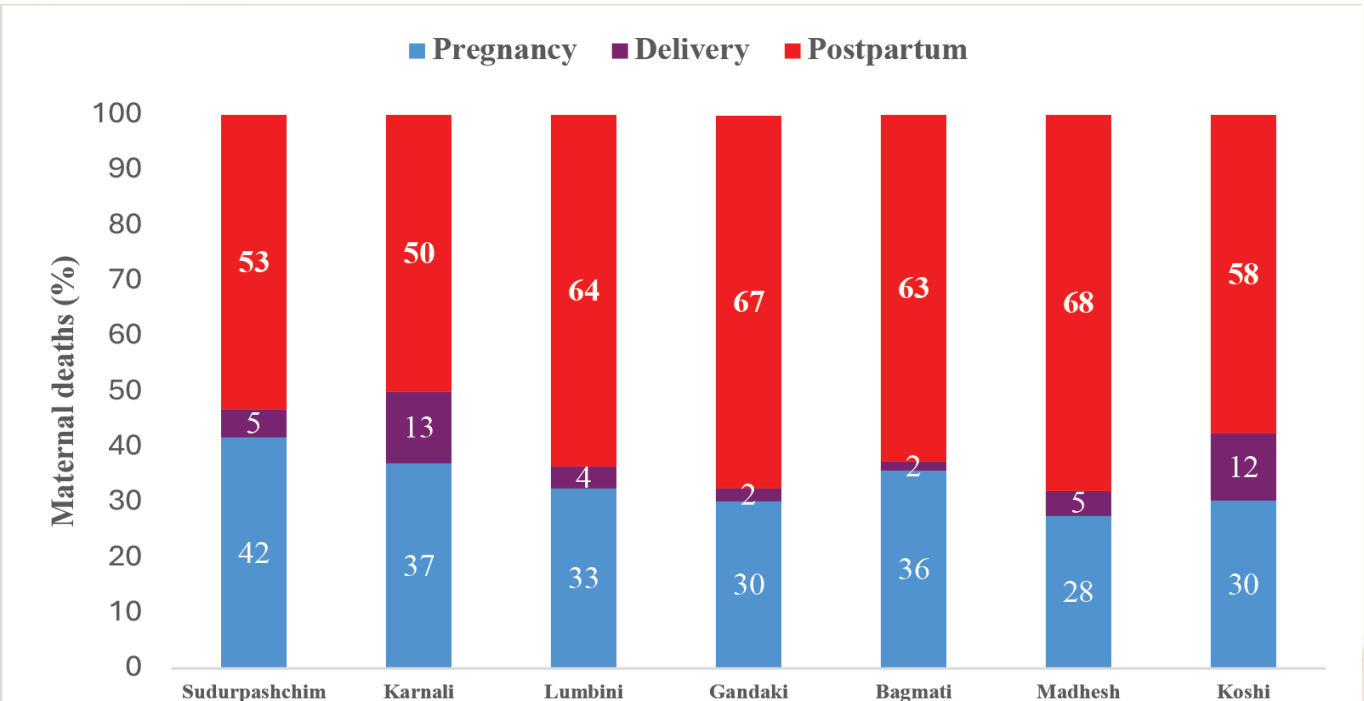
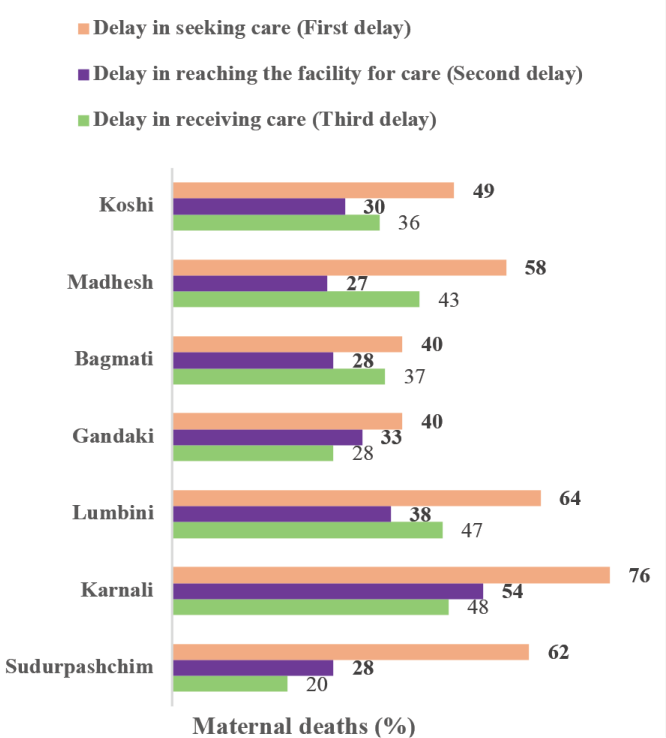


Figure 8: Maternal deaths during pregnancy, delivery and postpartum by province, 2022

Geographic inequities further compound the issue. The Terai region bears the highest burden, accounting for 55 percent of all maternal deaths, while the Mountain zone shows the greatest proportion of deaths during delivery (19 percent). Provincial variations are equally concerning: Lumbini (25 percent) and Madhesh (22 percent) report the highest shares of maternal deaths. Nearly half of all maternal fatalities (45 percent) occur in rural municipalities, emphasizing the urgent need to improve healthcare access in remote and underserved areas.

The leading causes of maternal deaths are non-obstetric complications (32 percent) and obstetric hemorrhage (26 percent), illustrating the persistent dual burden of direct and indirect maternal health risks (Annex I, Table 7). Postpartum complications account for the majority (61 percent) of maternal deaths, followed by deaths during pregnancy (33 percent) and delivery (6 percent).

Despite efforts to promote institutional deliveries, 26 percent of maternal deaths still occur at home, and 17 percent occur in transit—revealing systemic barriers to timely and adequate care. Vaginal deliveries account for 56 percent of maternal deaths, while cesarean sections represent a significant 38 percent, particularly in Bagmati Province (72 percent), raising questions about surgical safety and quality of emergency obstetric care.



**Figure 9:** Three delays of maternal deaths by province, 2022

The “three delays” model provides critical insights into these systemic failures. The most common delay is in seeking care (57 percent), followed by delays in reaching a facility (33 percent) and receiving timely, appropriate treatment (40 percent) (Figure 9). These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted policy and programmatic interventions to reduce preventable maternal deaths. Strengthening antenatal and postnatal care, expanding emergency obstetric services, and ensuring equitable access—especially in marginalized and remote communities—are vital steps toward ensuring that no woman dies while giving life.

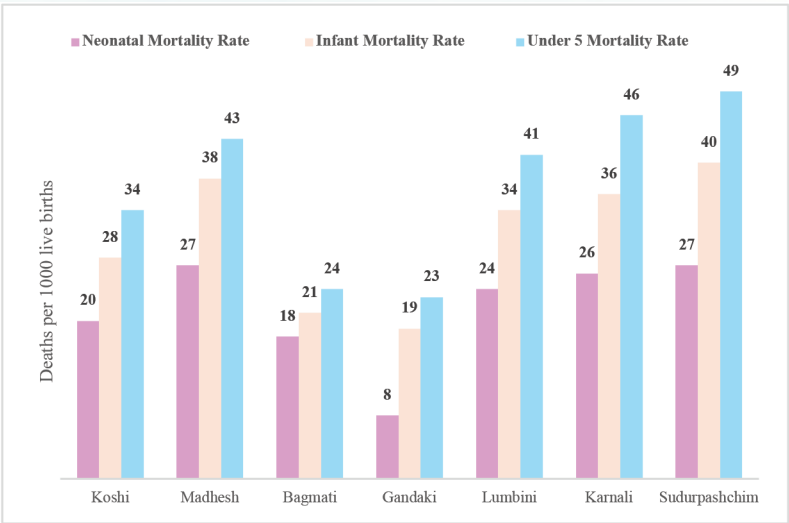
### 3.5 Early Childhood Mortality

Between 2011 to 2022, Nepal made significant strides in reducing neonatal, infant, and under-five mortality rates, yet deep-rooted inequalities persist (Annex I, Table 8). Neonatal mortality fell from 33 to 21 deaths per 1,000 live births, infant mortality from 46 to 28, and under-5 mortality from 54 to 33. These gains reflect improvement in access to healthcare, maternal education, and nutrition.

However, inequalities remain stark. Geographic inequalities are evident: Bagmati Province has the lowest under-five mortality rate (24 per 1,000 live births in 2022), while Sudurpashchim and Karnali Provinces report much higher rates (49 and 46, respectively, Figure 10).

Economic inequalities are even more pronounced. Children in the wealthiest households experience a mortality rate of just 16 per 1,000, compared to 53 among the poorest. Rural children also face higher under-five mortality (38) than those in urban areas (30), though this gap is gradually narrowing.

These findings call for urgent, equity-focused health policies, increased investment in underserved regions, and poverty reduction efforts to ensure that every child—regardless of gender, location, or income—has an equal chance to survive and thrive.



**Figure 10:** Neonatal, infant, and under-5 mortality rates by province, 2022

### 3.6 Child Health Service Utilization

Utilization of child health services—including vaccination, vitamin A supplementation, and care-seeking for childhood illnesses—shows mixed progress, marked by persistent inequalities across sex, residence, province, and wealth.

#### 3.6.1 Vaccination

Full basic vaccination coverage among children aged 12–23 months declined from 87 percent in 2011 to 78 percent in 2016, slightly recovering to 80 percent in 2022 (Annex I, Table 9). Boys consistently had higher vaccination rates than girls. While rural children saw modest gains, inequalities remain. Gandaki Province led with 93 percent coverage in 2022, while Madhesh lagged behind at 68 percent. Children from wealthier households were consistently more likely to be fully vaccinated than those from poorer households.

#### 3.6.2 Vitamin A Supplementation

Coverage remained relatively stable, with over 85 percent of children receiving supplements in 2022. However, inequalities persist, Gandaki reported the highest coverage at 94 percent, while Madhesh recorded the lowest at 80 percent.

#### 3.6.3 Diarrhea Treatment

Treatment-seeking for diarrhea rose significantly from 38 percent in 2011 to 64 percent in 2016 but declined to 57 percent in 2022. Urban-rural gaps were minimal, but provincial inequalities persisted: Lumbini (65 percent) and Sudurpashchim (63 percent) reported the highest treatment rates, whereas Koshi had the lowest at 49 percent. Wealth based inequalities were considerable, with only 49 percent of the poorest children receiving treatment compared to 66 percent of the richest.

These patterns underscore the need for targeted efforts to improve service access and health-seeking behaviors, especially among marginalized groups.



### 3.7 Nutritional Status of Children

Malnutrition continues to threaten Nepal's development and children's well-being and potential (Pomeroy-Stevens et al. 2016). While stunting and anemia have declined over the past decade, inequalities remain severe.

#### 3.7.1 Anemia

Anemia among children aged 6–59 months declined marginally from 46 percent in 2011 to 43 percent in 2022 (see Table 10, Annex I). Rural children remain slightly more affected than urban ones (43 percent vs. 44 percent). Madhesh Province recorded the highest prevalence (51 percent), while Gandaki had the lowest (31 percent). Economic inequalities are sharp: 42 percent of the poorest children are anemic, compared to 32 percent of the richest.

#### 3.7.2 Stunting

Stunting, or low height-for-age, is a measure of growth faltering. Stunting is a marker of the deficient growth environment to which children have been exposed and reflects the overall well-being of a population (Perumal et al. 2018). Suboptimal nutrition can contribute to stunting, while other causes include recurrent infection, chronic diseases, and more; many of the causes of stunting are complex and unknown (WHO 2014).

Stunting—low height-for-age—declined from 41 percent in 2011 to 25 percent in 2022, but unevenly (Annex I, Table 10). Rural children remain more stunted (31 percent) than urban children (22 percent). Karnali has the highest stunting rate (36 percent), while Bagmati reports the lowest (18 percent). The poorest children (37 percent) are nearly three times more likely to be stunted than the richest (13 percent).

#### 3.7.3 Exclusive Breastfeeding

Exclusive breastfeeding declined from 70 percent in 2011 to 56 percent in 2022, with significant variation across provinces and income groups (see Table 11, Annex I). Karnali and Sudurpashchim had the highest rates (74 percent), while Lumbini dropped sharply to 36 percent. Poorer mothers breastfed exclusively more often (64 percent) than wealthier ones (44 percent) (Figure 11), possibly due to differences in access to formula and feeding practices.

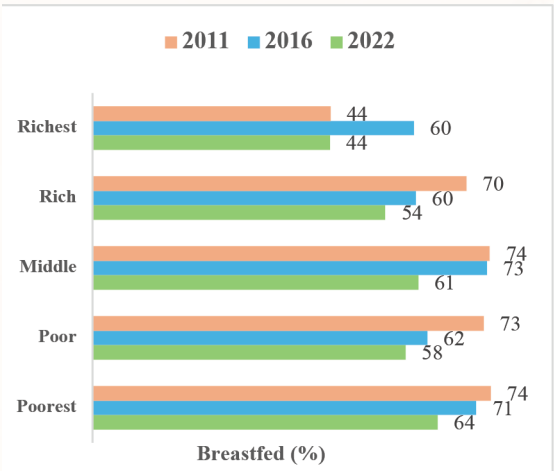


Figure 11: Trends in exclusive breastfeeding by household wealth, 2011-2022

#### 3.7.4 Minimum Acceptable Diet (MAD)

MAD—essential for child nutrition— improved from 24.6 percent in 2011 to 44 percent in 2022, yet major inequalities remain. Rural children are behind urban peers (40 percent vs. 46 percent). Madhesh Province trails with only 32 percent coverage, while Gandaki leads at 54 percent. Wealth based inequalities are stark: just 37 percent of the poorest children meet MAD standards, compared to 57 percent of the richest.

These findings highlight the need for comprehensive, equity-focused nutrition policies and interventions that reach the most vulnerable children.

### 3.8 Nutritional Status of Women

Women's nutrition reflects broader gender, economic, and social inequalities. Poor nutrition compromises women's health, productivity, and rights, reinforcing cycles of poverty and exclusion (WHO, 2021; UNDP, 2022). Addressing women's nutrition is essential for gender equity and sustainable development.

#### 3.8.1 Anemia in Women

Overall anemia prevalence among women declined slightly from 35 percent in 2011 to 34 percent in 2022 (Annex I, Table 12). Madhesh Province stands out with 52 percent of women affected—double the rate of Karnali (21 percent) and Bagmati (23 percent) (Figure 12). Muslim women face the highest anemia burden (50 percent), while Brahmin/Chhetri women report the lowest (26 percent). Wealth based inequalities are also clear: 41 percent of women in the middle wealth quintile are anemic, compared to 30 percent of the wealthiest.

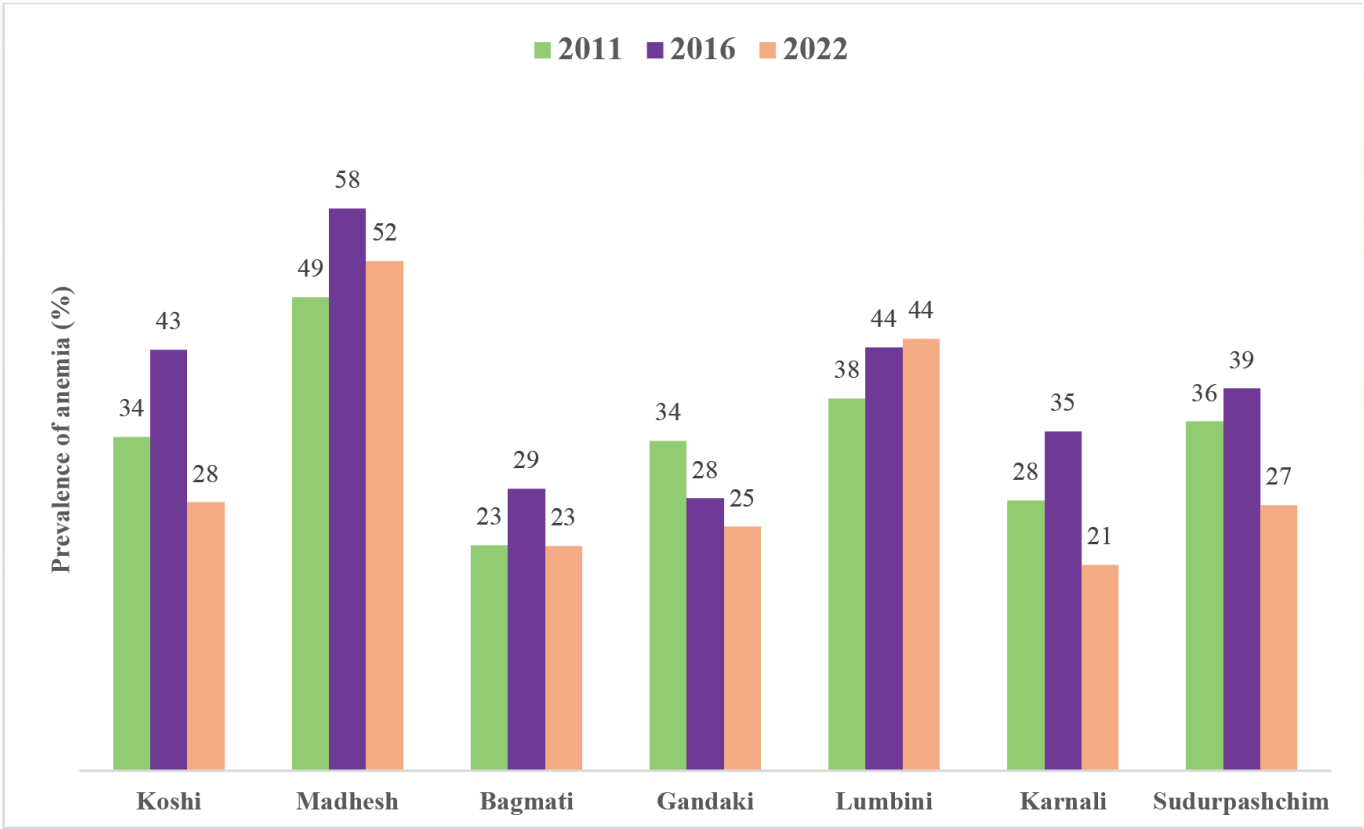


Figure 12: Anemia prevalence in women by province, 2011-2022

#### 3.8.2 Body Mass Index (BMI)

Undernutrition, measured by low BMI, fell from 18 percent in 2011 to 10 percent in 2022. Yet rural women remain disproportionately affected (12 percent) compared to urban women (10 percent) (Annex I, Table 12). Among the richest, only 5 percent are underweight, versus 14 percent among the poorest. Janajati women have shown remarkable improvement—from 33 percent in 2011 to

just 7 percent in 2022. However, Madhesh and Muslim women still face high undernutrition rates (19 percent).

These patterns call for urgent nutrition programs tailored to address social, regional, and economic inequalities affecting women's health.

### 3.9 Domestic Violence

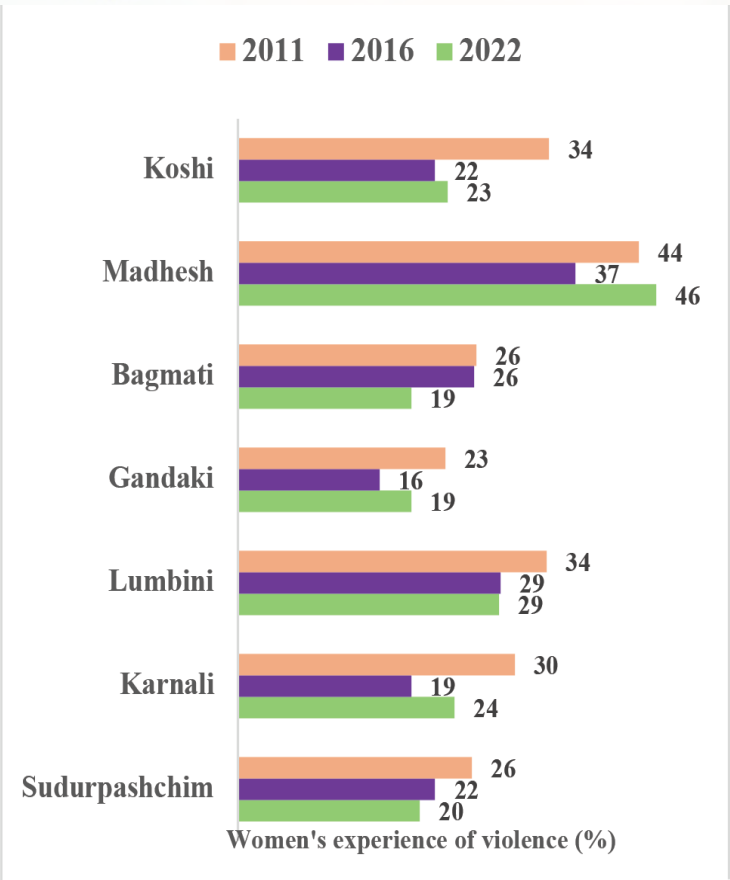
Domestic violence, a pervasive form of gender-based violence, disproportionately affects women and girls worldwide, perpetuating cycles of physical, emotional, and psychological harm (WHO, 2021). It remains a pervasive and deeply rooted gender-based issue in Nepal. Though overall rates have declined, many women—especially those in marginalized communities—continue to suffer in silence.

Spousal violence dropped from 32 percent in 2011 to 27 percent in 2022, but inequalities persist (Annex I, Table 13). Muslim women reported the highest prevalence in 2022 at 55 percent. Similarly, over 39 percent of Terai Madhesi Other women experienced violence throughout the decade. Madhesh Province recorded a rise in violence, reaching 46 percent in 2022.

Economic status-based inequalities are notable: 28 percent of women in the poorest households reported spousal violence, compared to 16 percent in the wealthiest.

Help-seeking behavior, though improving, remains worryingly low. While the national average rose from 23 percent in 2011 to 28 percent in 2022, Muslim women—despite experiencing high rates of violence—had the lowest help-seeking rate, improving from just 8 percent in 2011 to 22 percent in 2022. Dalit women also report consistently low rates of help-seeking.

These findings underscore the urgent need for systemic, survivor-centered strategies that prioritize protection, justice, and empowerment—particularly for women in marginalized communities.



**Figure 13:** Trends in women's experience of intimate partner violence by province, 2011-2022



## Conclusion

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Nepal continues to grapple with entrenched health inequalities rooted in systemic and structural factors, such as caste, ethnicity, gender, geography, and socioeconomic status. While some progress has been made, these inequalities remain a significant barrier to achieving UHC and the SDGs. Despite Nepal's commitments to international frameworks—including CEDAW, CRC, BPfA, ICPD, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—gaps between policy commitments and on-the-ground implementation persist.

The Health Sector Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy is a promising initiative; however, its impact depends heavily on effective execution, adequate resource allocation, and strong accountability mechanisms. Ongoing inequities expose weaknesses in governance, health financing, workforce distribution, and intersectoral collaboration, further widening the gaps in healthcare access and outcomes.

Addressing these structural barriers demands a comprehensive, sustained approach that moves beyond rhetoric to action—ensuring that policies are implemented effectively and that marginalized communities are prioritized in health sector reforms.

## Recommendations

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To systematically reduce health inequalities and accelerate progress toward UHC, a strategic, multi-dimensional approach is essential. The following policy, programmatic, and governance measures are recommended:

1. **Strengthen implementation and be accountability for the Public Health Service Act 2018 and the Health Sector GESI strategy**
  - Develop actionable implementation plans with measurable targets, timelines, and defined responsibilities.
  - Establish an independent monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress, identify bottlenecks, and enforce accountability.
  - Improve governance to ensure transparency and equity in resource allocation and service delivery.
2. **Expand access to basic health services to achieve UHC and advance GESI**
  - Improve primary healthcare infrastructure in marginalized and remote areas.
  - Deploy innovative outreach strategies, including mobile health clinics and telemedicine, to reach underserved populations.
  - Address human resource shortages through targeted training, incentives for rural deployment, and retention strategies.

### 3. Enhance financial protection and promote health equity

- Increase public health financing through progressive taxation, targeted subsidies, and inclusive health insurance schemes for marginalized groups.
- Strengthen financial risk protection mechanisms to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure and prevent healthcare-related impoverishment.
- Prioritize budget allocation for primary and preventive healthcare services.

### 4. Address social determinants of health through intersectoral collaboration

- Foster coordinated action across sectors (health, education, water and sanitation, agriculture, and social welfare) to tackle root causes of health inequities—such as poverty, discrimination, education gaps, and poor infrastructure.
- Support multi-sectoral initiatives to reduce poverty, improve nutrition, promote education, and expand access to clean water and sanitation.
- Promote gender-sensitive health policies that dismantle social and cultural barriers limiting women's and girls' access to healthcare.

### 5. Improve data collection and promote evidence-based decision-making

- Strengthen health information systems to generate disaggregated data by caste, gender, income, and geography.
- Use data to inform targeted interventions, monitor outcomes, and enhance accountability.
- Encourage community engagement in data collection to ensure policies reflect the lived realities of marginalized groups.

### 6. Leverage international best practices and contextual policy innovations

- Draw lessons from effective equity-based health systems, such as Thailand's Universal Coverage Scheme and Sri Lanka's primary healthcare model.
- Adapt proven approaches —such as decentralized service delivery and community-based health financing —to fit Nepal's socio-political context.
- Engage in regional and global health networks to strengthen policy coherence and leverage technical and financial support.

Nepal's journey toward health equity requires more than policy intent—it demands unwavering political will, coordinated implementation, sustained investment, and inclusive governance. Only by addressing structural inequities and prioritizing the needs of the most marginalized can Nepal bridge the health divide and ensure inclusive, resilient, and sustainable health outcomes for all.

# Annex I

## Details Tables

Table 1: Trends in total fertility rate for the 3 years before the survey, by caste/ethnicity, province, and wealth quintile 2011-2022.

Background Characteristics	Total Fertility Rate (TFR)		
	2011	2016	2022
<b>Caste/ethnicity</b>			
Brahmin/Chhetri (Hill/Terai)	2.2	2.0	2.0
Dalit (Hill/Terai)	3.2	2.7	2.4
Janajati (Hill/Terai)	2.4	2.1	1.8
Terai Madhesi Other	3.4	3.0	2.4
Muslim	5.0	3.6	3.3
<b>Residence</b>			
Urban	1.6	2.0	2.0
Rural	2.8	2.9	2.4
<b>Province</b>			
Koshi	2.4	2.3	2.2
Madhesh	3.4	3.0	2.7
Bagmati	1.8	1.8	1.6
Gandaki	2.5	2.0	1.4
Lumbini	2.6	2.4	1.9
Karnali	3.7	2.8	2.6
Sudurpashchim	2.8	2.2	2.3
<b>Wealth Quintile</b>			
Poorest (Lowest)	4.1	3.2	2.8
Poor (Second)	3.1	2.5	2.4
Middle	2.7	2.5	2.1
Rich (Fourth)	2.1	2.1	1.7
Highest (Richest)	1.5	1.6	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.1</b>

Source: NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022



**Table 2: Percentage distribution of currently married women aged 15-49 using modern contraceptive methods and experiencing unmet need for family planning, by caste/ethnicity, province, and wealth quintile 2011-2022.**

Background Characteristics	Modern Contraceptive Prevalence Rate ( percent)			Unmet Need ( percent)		
	2011	2016	2022	2011	2016	2022
<b>Caste/ethnicity</b>						
Brahmin/Chhetri (Hill/Terai)	43.1	40.5	39.6	26.7	34.7	20.7
Dalit (Hill/Terai)	40.0	42.7	44.0	31.3	27.7	25.5
Janajati (Hill/Terai)	44.5	46.8	45.4	28.4	23.3	19.7
Terai Madhesi Other	46.5	43.8	44.6	19.6	19.9	17.6
Muslim	22.8	24.6	27.6	39.4	26.5	24.7
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	49.8	44.2	40.7	19.6	22.7	20.7
Rural	42.1	40.6	46.8	28.1	25.3	21.1
<b>Province</b>						
Koshi	34.9	40.1	43.5	31.2	24.9	17.6
Madhesh	44.2	42.2	40.5	23.5	20.6	21.1
Bagmati	55.6	49.2	44.6	20.8	19.8	16.0
Gandaki	39.9	37.3	35.1	35.4	30.0	28.1
Lumbini	40.5	38.9	43.0	29.7	27.9	23.3
Karnali	39.8	44.5	45.9	29.6	25.7	23.4
Sudurpashchim	47.1	48.1	47.0	24.6	21.3	22.1
<b>Wealth Quintile</b>						
Poorest (Lowest)	35.6	41.8	44.7	31.9	27.0	24.7
Poor (Second)	41.1	44.8	46.9	28.6	23.7	21.4
Middle	43.3	42.8	44.4	28.9	24.3	20.4
Rich (Fourth)	45.3	41.7	38.7	26.8	23.8	20.9
Highest (Richest)	48.9	43.0	39.0	22.4	20.5	16.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>42.8</b>	<b>42.7</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>20.8</b>

- indicates that a figure is based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases and has been suppressed.

**Source:** NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022

**Table 3: Percentage of women aged 15–49 with four or more antenatal care visits for their most recent live birth in the past 10 years, by ethnicity, province, and wealth quintile (2011–2022)**

Background Characteristics	Attended four or more ANC visits ( percent)		
	2011	2016	2022
<b>Caste/ethnicity</b>			
Brahmin/Chhetri (Hill/Terai)	63.5	81.1	90.4
Dalit (Hill/Terai)	39.9	62.2	71.4
Janajati (Hill/Terai)	46.4	69.7	83.9
Terai Madhesi Other	35.9	58.8	72.7
Muslim	34.8	52.5	73.3
<b>Residence</b>			
Urban	71.8	75.5	79.5
Rural	47.7	61.7	82.4
<b>Province</b>			
Koshi	52.7	76.9	78.8
Madhesh	33.5	53.4	68.4
Bagmati	60.7	78.4	88.8
Gandaki	53.0	76.7	84.6
Lumbini	53.2	73.7	86.9
Karnali	39.9	52.2	79.1
Sudurpashchim	60.2	77.3	90.0
<b>Wealth Quintile</b>			
Poorest (Lowest)	28.3	56.7	74.5
Poor (Second)	39.1	65.4	76.7
Middle	48.0	66.8	77.7
Rich (Fourth)	65.1	74.7	84.5
Highest (Richest)	83.7	87.4	92.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>50.1</b>	<b>69.4</b>	<b>80.5</b>

- indicates that a figure is based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases and has been suppressed.

**Source:** NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022

**Table 4: Percentage of women aged 15-49 with a live birth in the past 10 years attended by a skilled provider and delivered in a health facility, by caste/ethnicity, place of residence, province, and wealth quintile, 2011-2022**

Background Characteristics	Delivery attended by skilled providers <sup>1</sup> ( percent)			Delivered in health facility ( per-cent)		
	2011	2016	2022	2011	2016	2022
<b>Caste/ethnicity</b>						
Brahmin/Chhetri (Hill/Terai)	45.5	67.8	86.5	44.1	68.4	86.9
Dalit (Hill/Terai)	26.8	47.9	70.9	26.4	45.4	70.1
Janajati (Hill/Terai)	28.8	59.0	83.9	28.9	57.9	83.3
Terai Madhesi Other	39.3	48.4	77.7	37.9	48.1	76.2
Muslim	32.9	52.9	70.8	32.3	51.6	67.3
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	72.7	67.7	81.4	71.3	68.6	80.9
Rural	32.3	46.8	77.6	31.6	44.2	76.5
<b>Province</b>						
Koshi	43.9	63.1	81.8	41.4	62.2	81.5
Madhesh	29.8	48.6	68.0	28.6	44.6	66.8
Bagmati	44.0	69.9	86.6	45.1	70.7	88.3
Gandaki	40.0	69.9	89.2	42.6	68.3	87.7
Lumbini	35.9	56.6	86.9	34.6	59.4	84.4
Karnali	20.3	35.3	72.2	20.7	35.6	72.4
Sudurpashchim	30.7	66.0	87.8	29.0	66.4	86.8
<b>Wealth Quintile</b>						
Poorest (Lowest)	10.7	33.9	67.0	11.4	33.9	65.8
Poor (Second)	23.7	48.0	73.1	23.3	46.6	73.2
Middle	35.9	59.4	81.2	35.4	57.6	79.6
Rich (Fourth)	53.0	70.0	88.2	51.9	69.5	87.1
Highest (Richest)	81.5	88.7	97.4	77.9	89.6	97.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>58.0</b>	<b>80.1</b>	<b>35.3</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>79.4</b>

- indicates that a figure is based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases and has been suppressed.

<sup>1</sup> Skilled provider includes doctor, nurse, and auxiliary nurse-midwife.

**Source:** NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022



**Table 5: Percentage of women aged 15–49 with a live birth in the past 10 years who received a postnatal care checkup within the first two days after birth, by caste/ethnicity, place of residence, province, and wealth quintile (2011–2022)**

Background Characteristics	Postnatal care check during the first 2 days after birth ( percent)		
	2011	2016	2022
<b>Caste/ethnicity</b>			
Brahmin/Chhetri (Hill/Terai)	54.3	69.3	75.4
Dalit (Hill/Terai)	36.6	49.3	64.2
Janajati (Hill/Terai)	38.3	54.6	74.0
Terai Madhesi Other	42.3	47.5	64.0
Muslim	43.1	50.5	66.4
<b>Residence</b>			
Urban	72.4	63.9	71.6
Rural	41.7	48.4	67.6
<b>Province</b>			
Koshi	52.5	61.5	77.3
Madhesh	39.1	45.1	57.8
Bagmati	46.0	67.3	73.9
Gandaki	47.2	68.3	76.4
Lumbini	43.7	59.9	77.2
Karnali	30.6	38.5	57.9
Sudurpashchim	46.5	57.6	77.7
<b>Wealth Quintile</b>			
Poorest (Lowest)	16.7	36.7	55.5
Poor (Second)	35.7	49.5	65.4
Middle	48.2	55.5	71.4
Fourth (Rich)	59.1	68.6	77.7
Highest (Richest)	82.1	81.2	87.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>56.7</b>	<b>70.2</b>

- indicates that a figure is based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases and has been suppressed.

**Source:** NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022

**Table 6: Percentage of maternal deaths during pregnancy, delivery and postpartum by socio-demographic characteristics, 2021.**

Background Characteristics	Pregnancy ( percent)	Delivery ( per- cent)	Postpartum ( percent)	Total ( percent)
<b>Education</b>				
Never been schooling/Don't know	26.0	6.5	67.5	37.8
1-8 class	36.7	8.6	54.7	20.9
9-12 class	34.7	4.6	60.6	35.4
Bachelor and above	47.2	0.0	52.8	5.9
<b>Province</b>				
Koshi	30.3	12.1	57.6	16.2
Madhesh	27.6	4.5	67.9	21.9
Bagmati	35.8	1.5	62.7	11.0
Gandaki	30.2	2.3	67.4	7.0
Lumbini	32.5	3.9	63.6	25.2
Karnali	37.0	13.0	50.0	8.8
Sudurpashchim	41.7	5.0	53.3	9.8
<b>Ecological zone</b>				
Mountain	37.8	18.9	43.2	6.1
Hill	30.3	7.5	62.2	39.4
Terai	33.6	3.3	63.1	54.5
<b>Place of residence</b>				
Metro and sub-metropolitan cities	35.8	1.5	62.7	11.0
Municipalities	31.8	4.5	63.7	43.7
Rural municipalities	32.5	8.3	59.2	45.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>32.6</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>61.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source:** MoHP, NSO. (2022). National Population and Housing Census 2021: Nepal Maternal Mortality Study 2021. Kathmandu: Ministry of Health and Population; National Statistics Office.

**Table 7: Percentage of maternal deaths by underlying cause, place, mode of delivery, contributing delays and period of deaths by province, 2021**

	Koshi	Madhesh	Bagmati	Gandaki	Lumbini	Karnali	Sudurpas-chim	Total
<b>Causes of maternal deaths</b>								
Non-obstetric complications	42.4	26.1	52.2	37.2	31.2	13.0	23.3	32.2
Obstetric hemorrhage	26.3	30.6	13.4	32.6	24.0	25.9	28.3	25.9
Hypertensive disorders in pregnancy, child-birth and the puerperium	13.1	11.9	6.0	9.3	11.7	16.7	13.3	11.8
Pregnancy-related infection	3.0	10.4	1.5	2.3	11.0	7.4	6.7	7.2
Other obstetric complications	6.1	4.5	17.9	0.0	5.2	3.7	8.3	6.4
Direct death without an obstetric code	1.0	6.7	4.5	9.3	5.2	14.8	8.3	6.2
Unanticipated complications of management	1.0	1.5	0.0	2.3	0.6	1.9	1.7	1.1
Unknown/undetermined	5.1	3.0	1.5	0.0	4.5	7.4	10.0	4.4
<b>Place of maternal deaths</b>								
Health facilities	59	56	73.0	67	54	50	40	57.0
Home	20	30	13.0	16	29	37	37	26.0
One the way from home to health facility	12	11	6.0	12	5	4	10	9.0
One the way from one health facility to another	9	3	6.0	5	12	9	12	8.0
Others/Don't know	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4
<b>Mode of delivery</b>								
Vaginal delivery	51	60	26.0	50	65	59	66	56.0
Assisted (Instrumental) delivery	3	0.0	2.0	3	6	6	3	3.0
Caesarean delivery	41	37	72.0	47	27	29	29	38.0
<b>Three delays of maternal deaths</b>								
Delay in seeking care (First delay)	49	58	40	40	64	76	62	56.6
Delay in reaching the facility for care (Second delay)	30	27	28	33	38	54	28	33.3
Delay in receiving care (Third delay)	36	43	37	28	47	48	20	39.6
<b>Period of maternal deaths</b>								
Pregnancy	30	28	36.0	30	32	37	42	33.0
Delivery	12	4	1.0	2	4	13	5	6.0
Postpartum	58	68	63.0	68	64	50	53	61.0

Note: Cause of maternal deaths were assigned using the WHO ICD MM classification following the ICD-10 code.

**Source:** MoHP, NSO. (2022). National Population and Housing Census 2021: Nepal Maternal Mortality Study 2021. Kathmandu: Ministry of Health and Population; National Statistics Office.



Table 8: Neonatal mortality rate, infant mortality rate, and under-5 mortality rate by ethnicity, province, and wealth quintile, 2011-2022.

Background Characteristics	Neonatal mortality rate			Infant mortality rate			Under-5 mortality rate		
	2011	2016	2022	2011	2016	2022	2011	2016	2022
Child's Sex									
Male	37	24	24	54	31	30	63	36	35
Female	33	17	17	52	34	27	62	41	30
Residence									
Urban	25	16	19	38	28	25	45	34	30
Rural	36	26	25	55	38	34	64	44	38
Province									
Koshi	37	23	20	52	31	28	69	34	34
Madhesh	45	24	27	54	38	38	68	48	43
Bagmati	24	11	18	31	25	21	35	27	24
Gandaki	38	12	8	44	18	19	52	23	23
Lumbini	24	19	24	35	32	34	42	34	41
Karnali	28	31	26	47	41	36	60	51	46
Sudurpashchim	38	29	27	61	39	40	74	49	49
Wealth Quintile									
Poorest (Lowest)	29	26	26	49	36	45	59	44	53
Poor (Second)	37	28	31	46	39	41	56	47	50
Middle	42	15	21	53	29	26	61	34	30
Rich (Fourth)	35	22	17	46	36	23	53	40	28
Highest (Richest)	16	8	13	29	18	15	34	22	16
Total	33	21	21	46	32	28	54	39	33

-- indicates that data is not available.

Source: NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022

**Table 9: Percentage of children aged 12–23 months who received all basic vaccinations, percentage of children aged 6–59 months who received Vitamin A supplements in the six months preceding the survey, and percentage of children under five who sought treatment, by sex, place of residence, caste/ethnicity, province, and wealth quintile, 2011–2022.**

Background Characteristics	All basic vaccinations <sup>1</sup> ( percent)			Vitamin A supplement U5 ( percent)			Treatment of diarrhoea ( percent)		
	2011	2016	2022	2011	2016	2022	2011	2016	2022
<b>Sex</b>									
Male	88.2	77.4	81.5	91.5	85.8	85.0	40.9	71.9	58.3
Female	85.7	78.4	78.4	89.3	86.8	85.3	34.0	56.1	55.6
<b>Residence</b>									
Urban	90.0	78.5	79.8	86.4	85.4	84.3	43.2	59.8	56.5
Rural	86.6	77.0	80.3	90.8	87.4	86.6	37.5	70.2	58.3
<b>Province</b>									
Koshi	87.3	79.4	80.8	90.3	84.9	84.1	40.2	65.7	48.7
Madhesh	79.3	65.2	67.7	82.6	74.0	79.7	29.2	68.2	56.8
Bagmati	91.3	85.3	83.4	87.9	83.4	87.9	28.1	(32.1)	58.8
Gandaki	92.6	92.7	93.4	88.0	87.1	94.4	54.3	*	(48.7)
Lumbini	91.0	78.3	85.3	83.1	85.5	88.2	41.7	82.4	65.0
Karnali	76.5	74.9	84.3	87.3	89.6	81.9	34.3	(83.3)	56.4
Sudurpashchim	93.7	83.4	88.8	90.5	87.1	88.3	52.0	(65.9)	62.6
<b>Wealth Quintile</b>									
Poorest (Lowest)	84.5	76.6	75.8	86.6	85.7	85.2	32.7	54.7	49.0
Poor (Second)	83.9	77.2	74.1	87.2	82.1	86.0	38.7	61.0	64.9
Middle	84.0	70.9	85.0	86.2	79.8	85.6	38.9	75.2	53.5
Rich (Fourth)	91.5	84.8	85.2	88.0	81.6	83.1	44.1	66.8	56.0
Highest (Richest)	95.7	81.6	82.8	86.2	83.7	85.8	37.1	(59.0)	(66.2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>87.0</b>	<b>77.8</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>86.8</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>85.1</b>	<b>38.0</b>	<b>64.4</b>	<b>57.1</b>

Note: Figures in parentheses are based on 25–49 unweighted cases. An asterisk indicates that a figure is based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases and has been suppressed.

<sup>1</sup> BCG, three doses of DPT-HepB-Hib (pentavalent), three doses of polio vaccine, and one dose of measles/rubella.

**Source:** NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022

Table 10: Percentage distribution of children aged 6-59 months with anaemia, and stunting by child's sex, place of residence, caste/ethnicity, province, and wealth quintile, 2011-2022

Background Characteristics	Any anaemia ( percent)			Stunting ( percent)		
	2011	2016	2022	2011	2016	2022
Sex						
Male	43.4	52.7	43.9	41.4	36.0	24.7
Female	49.1	52.6	42.7	39.5	35.7	25.0
Residence						
Urban	41.2	49.3	43.7	26.7	32.0	21.5
Rural	46.7	56.3	42.7	41.8	40.2	31.0
Province						
Koshi	45.1	55.2	33.9	45.1	32.6	20.0
Madhesh	51.1	59.4	50.6	51.1	37.0	29.3
Bagmati	37.6	42.8	42.5	37.6	29.4	17.6
Gandaki	40.3	46.23	30.7	40.3	28.9	19.7
Lumbini	50.1	53.4	48.9	50.1	38.5	25.1
Karnali	48.6	48.4	39.7	48.6	54.5	35.8
Sudurpashchim	49.4	49.8	45.4	49.4	35.9	28.4
Wealth Quintile						
Poorest (Lowest)	45.3	48.7	41.7	45.3	49.2	36.9
Poor (Second)	49.6	49.6	45.5	49.6	38.7	28.4
Middle	51.4	59.9	45.9	51.4	35.7	22.3
Rich (Fourth)	43.2	58.4	49.2	43.2	32.4	17.7
Highest (Richest)	37.5	41.2	32.3	37.5	16.5	13.1
Total	46.2	52.7	43.3	40.5	35.8	24.8

- indicates that a figure is based on fewer than 25 unweighted cases and has been suppressed.

Source: NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022



**Table 11: Percentage of children aged 0-6 months exclusively breastfed, and children aged 6-23 months receiving a minimum acceptable diet by child's sex, place of residence, caste/ethnicity, province, and wealth quintile, 2011-2022**

Background Characteristics	Exclusive breastfeeding ( per-cent)			Minimum acceptable diet ( per-cent)		
	2011	2016	2022	2011	2016	2022
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	-	-	53.7	24.3	35.2	43.7
Female	-	-	59.1	25.0	37.7	43.2
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	-	62.9	56.8	37.8	36.6	45.6
Rural	-	69.0	55.5	23.2	36.1	39.6
<b>Province</b>						
Koshi	63.6	55.1	52.7	31.0	34.3	47.0
Madhesh	85.1	60.0	65.0	5.3	20.8	31.7
Bagmati	48.1	58.0	42.6	35.1	43.5	49.2
Gandaki	67.6	(72.9)	(63.7)	43.3	52.6	53.6
Lumbini	61.7	75.0	36.3	21.2	44.2	45.9
Karnali	(69.6)	(71.2)	73.8	14.6	40.6	46.5
Sudurpashchim	78.3	(83.6)	73.8	24.8	36.2	45.8
<b>Wealth Quintile</b>						
Poorest (Lowest)	74.0	71.3	64.1	13.9	31.6	36.7
Poor (Second)	72.7	62.2	58.2	19.9	34.7	39.9
Middle	73.8	73.3	60.5	22.1	29.3	41.9
Rich (Fourth)	69.5	60.1	54.4	36.3	41.6	47.1
Highest (Richest)	44.2	59.7	44.1	40.7	49.9	57.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>69.6</b>	<b>66.1</b>	<b>56.4</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>36.4</b>	<b>43.5</b>

- indicates that data is not available. Figures in parentheses are based on 25-49 unweighted cases and should be interpreted with caution.

**Source:** NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022

**Table 12: Percentage of women aged 15-49 with any anemia and body mass index, by caste/ethnicity, place of residence, province, and wealth quintile, 2011-2022**

Background Characteristics	Anemia ( percent)			Body Mass Index Thin ( percent)		
	2011	2016	2022	2011	2016	2022
<b>Caste/ethnicity</b>						
Brahmin/Chhetri (Hill/Terai)	31.6	36.5	25.6	16.3	15.2	8.5
Dalit (Hill/Terai)	37.5	38.4	36.3	25.9	21.1	15.1
Janajati (Hill/Terai)	36.5	39.7	31.4	32.6	27.9	6.5
Terai Madhesi Other	40.2	55.6	48.4	13.9	12.4	15.9
Muslim	54.8	51.8	50.0	36.5	31.4	19.2
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	27.6	39.6	33.8	14.1	15.7	9.5
Rural	36.2	42.7	34.2	18.8	20.0	12.0
<b>Province</b>						
Koshi	34.3	43.3	27.6	13.5	13.0	8.6
Madhesh	48.7	57.8	52.4	32.5	29.1	18.5
Bagmati	23.2	29.0	23.1	12.5	11.6	4.0
Gandaki	33.9	28.0	25.1	7.8	8.1	4.5
Lumbini	38.3	43.5	44.4	20.4	19.0	11.8
Karnali	27.8	34.9	21.2	20.8	15.2	10.1
Sudurpashchim	35.9	39.3	27.3	23.9	22.1	15.1
<b>Wealth Quintile</b>						
Poorest (Lowest)	34.5	32.3	25.7	21.5	19.1	13.9
Poor (Second)	35.4	41.5	35.4	21.2	21.1	14.2
Middle	38.6	49.0	41.2	21.5	21.3	12.3
Rich (Fourth)	35.5	43.4	37.1	16.6	17.3	7.4
Highest (Richest)	31.2	36.0	29.7	11.9	8.6	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>40.8</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>10.3</b>

**Source:** NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022

**Table 13: Percentage of ever-married women aged 15-49 who have ever experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence committed by their current or most recent husband, and percent distribution of women aged 15-49 who have ever experienced physical or sexual violence by their help-seeking behaviour by caste/ethnicity, place of residence, province, and wealth quintile, 2011-2022**

Background Characteristics	Ever experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence ( percent)			Among those who experienced physical or sexual violence, ever sought help from any source ( percent)		
	2011	2016	2022	2011	2016	2022
<b>Caste/ethnicity</b>						
Brahmin/Chhetri (Hill/Terai)	24.7	15.8	18.0	24.5	25.1	34.1
Dalit (Hill/Terai)	38.1	35.5	35.7	23.9	22.2	21.5
Janajati (Hill/Terai)	33.0	23.5	21.0	22.4	25.8	31.5
Terai Madhesi Other	45.5	39.3	42.9	26.4	15.4	26.2
Muslim	55.9	41.3	55.0	7.7	21.2	22.3
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	30.5	25.4	27.1	26.4	24.7	27.8
Rural	31.7	27.7	27.7	21.7	18.4	28.5
<b>Province</b>						
Koshi	34.1	21.6	23.0	29.7	31.9	32.1
Madhesh	43.9	37.1	45.8	16.3	14.6	25.6
Bagmati	26.1	25.9	19.0	24.5	22.8	32.9
Gandaki	22.7	15.5	19.1	(22.3)	38.9	27.3
Lumbini	33.8	28.8	28.6	20.9	19.3	28.9
Karnali	30.3	19.1	23.7	13.7	(24.6)	27.9
Sudurpashchim	25.6	21.6	19.9	24.5	21.8	16.4
<b>Wealth Quintile</b>						
Poorest (Lowest)	34.2	24.4	27.6	19.2	26.6	29.8
Poor (Second)	34.8	28.5	34.5	24.3	24.6	27.2
Middle	38.2	32.1	30.7	20.4	18.9	25.6
Rich (Fourth)	32.0	26.6	27.3	27.3	20.1	29.7
Highest (Richest)	19.6	19.1	16.2	23.1	22.4	27.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>28.0</b>

Figures in parentheses are based on 25-49 unweighted cases and should be interpreted with caution.

**Source:** NDHS 2011, 2016 and 2022





# Income and Wealth Inequality

*-By Pankaj Thapa and Raju Sharma*

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# Introduction

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Over the past three decades, Nepal has made commendable progress in reducing poverty and improving average living standards. Nominal household incomes and per capita consumption have risen significantly, driven by factors such as remittance inflows, expanded social protection, and improved access to services. However, these aggregate gains mask persistent and growing inequalities in both income and wealth.

This chapter examines the landscape of income and wealth inequality in Nepal, drawing on the most recent national and international data, including findings from the Fourth National Living Standards Survey (NLSS-IV). It begins by situating Nepal's experience within global inequality trends and then presents a statistical overview of income and wealth inequalities within the country. The chapter explores the structural factors contributing to inequality, including inequalities in land ownership, asset accumulation, labour force participation, and remittance flows. It also highlights the intersectional nature of inequality, with a particular focus on gender, region, and political exclusion.

The chapter then assesses the policy environment, examining the implications of Nepal's tax structure, privatisation trends, and neoliberal reforms for economic redistribution and social justice. The chapter concludes with key recommendations for addressing income and wealth inequality, calling for a shift from growth-centred approaches to those grounded in redistribution, equity, and structural reform.

## Income and Wealth Inequality

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### A Global Phenomenon

Income and wealth inequality continue to define the global economic landscape, with the richest 1 percent of the world's population owing nearly 45 percent of all global wealth (Oxfam, 2025), while 3.6 billion people (44 percent of the global population) live below the World Bank's poverty line of \$6.85 per day (World Bank, 2024). The inequality is further exacerbated by geographical divides, as the Global North continues to accumulate disproportionate economic power at the expense of the Global South (Oxfam, 2025). In 2023 alone, the richest 1 percent in the Global North extracted \$263 billion from the Global South through the financial system. This vast financial imbalance, according to Oxfam 2025, is entrenched in historical colonial wealth extraction and modern economic mechanisms that ensure wealth continues to flow from poorer nations to wealthier elites.

### Income Inequality in Nepal: A Statistical Overview

The Gini Index is a measure of income or wealth inequality within a population. Ranging from 0 to 1, where 0 represents perfect equality, and 1 representing perfect inequality, the Gini index helps assess economic inequalities within a population and assists in realising wealth gaps.

According to Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022 -23), Nepal's national Gini index via consumption is 0.30, an improvement from 0.32 in 2010-11, and a historically whopping 0.41 in 2003-04.



**Table A4: Gini index, 1995-96 to 2022-23**

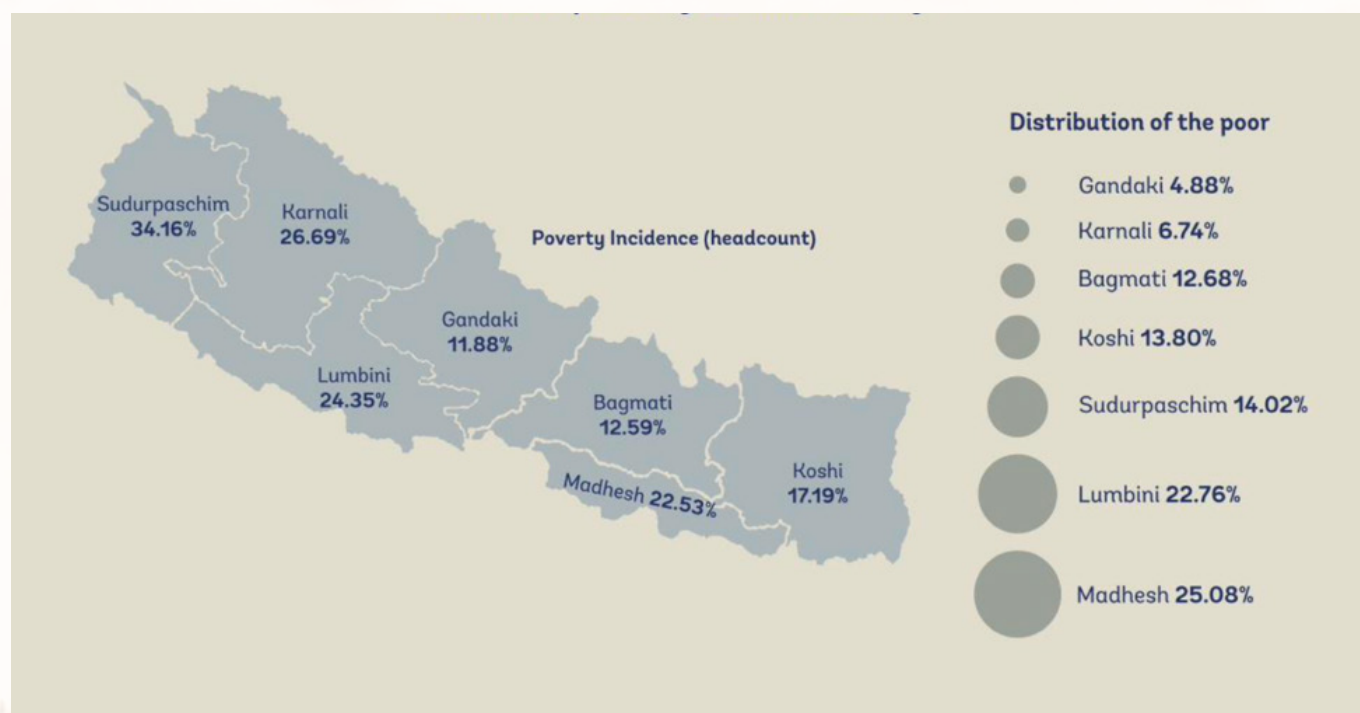
	Nepal	Gini index	
		Urban	Rural
First Survey (1995-96)	32.2	42.7	30.8
Second Survey (2003-04)	41.4	43.6	34.9
Third Survey (2010-11)	32.8	35.3	31.1
Fourth Survey (2022-23)	30.0	30.3	28.7

Note: Numbers for 1995-96 and 2003-04 are based on the 1995-96 poverty line. 2010-11 are based on 2010-11 poverty line and 2022-23 are based on the 2022-23 poverty line.

**Table 1: Gini index by consumption (National Living Standard Survey 2023)**

The World Bank (2024) quoting the Fourth National Living Standard Survey states the reduction in Nepal's Gini coefficient could be attributed to increased remittance from migrant workers, increase in non-farm activities, and a general improvement across multiple social spaces. Similarly, a Progress Assessment Report along Nepal's Sustainable Development Goals (2016 – 2019) shows improvement in social security schemes which accounted for 11.3 percent of the national budget as a "historically encouraging picture" which has contributed to improvement in Nepal's income (National Planning Commission, 2021).

Despite the amazing feat of pulling millions out of poverty, Nepal faces steep challenges relating to income inequalities. For example, 20.27 percent of the nation's population continues to live below the poverty line. Furthermore, almost 50 percent of those living under the poverty line hail from Madhes (25.08 percent) and Lumbini Pradesh (22.76 percent) (NSO, 2023). Similarly, poverty incidence by headcount is high in remote regions like Sudurpaschim Province and Karnali Province (NSO, 2023).



**Image Source:** National Living Standards Survey, 2023

## Wealth Inequality in Nepal: A Statistical Overview

Inequality in wealth creation in Nepal is increasing where a concentrated group has maintained its control over a disproportionate share of the nation's resources while millions struggle to meet basic needs. In recent years the gap between the rich and poor has widened sharply resulting into Nepal being among the most unequal countries in South Asia (Oxfam International, 2023). The benefits of this unprecedented economic growth have gone to a tiny few. Inequality has reached extreme levels in the country, and today the wealthiest 10 percent own more than 57 percent of the total wealth while the bottom 40 percent subsists on less than 10 percent (World Bank, 2022). The Palma Ratio shows that Nepal's richest 10 percent earn more than three times the income of the poorest 40 percent. Their wealth is over 26 times greater<sup>1</sup>.

### Wealth Inequality and Income Inequality

Inequality with respect to capital is always greater than inequality with respect to income from labor. Historically it has been seen that the distribution of income from capital ownership is always more concentrated than the distribution of income from labor. According to (Piketty, 2017) "the upper 10 percent of the labor income distribution generally receives 25-30 percent of the total labor income, whereas the top 10 percent of the capital income distribution always owns more than 50 percent of all income from wealth". Further, the bottom 50 percent of the wage distribution has always received approximately equal share of total labor income as received by the top 10 percent, while the bottom 50 percent of the wealth distribution owns generally less than 5 percent of the total wealth as the wealthiest 10 percent.

It must also be recognised that the increase in wealth and assets ownership is being facilitated by the state policies on privatisation and deregulation, access to credit terms, and weak wealth tax structure. For instance, the central bank of Nepal permitted banks to reschedule their loan payment schedule for pandemic affected businesses and capped interest rates during COVID 19, a facility which was enjoyed by large companies and corporate houses in Nepal. These facilities could not be enjoyed by majority of small businesses as these were either not registered or operated with limited financial capabilities<sup>2</sup>.

This nuanced understanding of the different effects of income inequality and wealth inequality is required to design suitable policy instruments to reduce wealth inequality. Addressing income inequality only, will not result into wealth equality.

Consumption Quintile	Farm ( per-cent)	Wage ( per-cent)	Non-agri enterprises ( percent)	Assets and rent ( per-cent)	Net Remittances ( percent)	Own housing ( percent)	Other ( per-cent)	Total ( per-cent)
Poorest	20.8	37.7	5.7	0.2	14.1	11.1	10.5	100
Second	19.6	35.4	6.7	0.5	18.1	11.1	8.6	100
Third	17.6	35.1	9.7	0.6	17.9	10.8	8.3	100
Fourth	16.7	29.2	11.8	1.5	18.1	12.2	10.6	100
Richest	11.2	30.1	15.8	3.7	14.3	14.1	10.9	100

**Table 2:** Shares of Household Income by Employment Source (Nepal Living Standards Survey)

<sup>1</sup> <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/story/52318/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2020/12/20/covid-19-affected-businesses-to-protest-demanding-relief-and-rehabilitation-package>



Table 2 reveals stark economic inequalities in Nepal, highlighting how the wealthiest households diversify their income beyond wages and agriculture, while the poorest remain dependent on farming and wages with limited access to entrepreneurial opportunities. Non-agricultural enterprises serve as a major income source for the wealthiest, whereas the poorest rely heavily on farm earnings. Additionally, rental income plays a significant role in wealth accumulation, contributing 3.7 percent of earnings for the top 20 percent but a negligible share for the bottom 40 percent—just 0.2 percent for the lowest quintile and 0.5 percent for the second. As a result, Nepal's richest 20 percent earn significantly more than the poorest 40 percent (NSO, 2023).

Land ownership further illustrates these inequalities. According to the Fourth Household Living Standards Survey 2022/23, 29.5 percent of agricultural households own less than 0.1 hectares of land, while 27.6 percent own between 0.1 and 0.25 hectares. In contrast, land ownership is highly concentrated, with just 3 percent of Nepal's population controlling more than 2 hectares of agricultural land. Meanwhile, reliance on rented land has grown substantially, with the share of agricultural households operating on leased land rising from 4.8 percent in 1995/96 to 18.4 percent in 2022/23.

This inequality is further reflected in land rental patterns. Among the wealthiest 20 percent, 35 percent have leased out their agricultural land, generating passive income, while households in the bottom 60 percent increasingly rely on renting land for farming—reducing their disposable income (NSO, 2023). This dynamic exacerbates economic inequality, as rental payments made by the poorest households ultimately transfer wealth to the richest, reinforcing existing financial divides.

## Wealth Inequality and Social Mobility

Wealth accumulation in the hands of a concentrated population impedes equitable and sustainable development. The concentration of resources among a select few not only limits social mobility but actively ensures majority population continue to face chronic poverty. This is reflected in a high wealth Gini coefficient of 0.74, where the richest 10 percent of Nepal possess more than 26 times the wealth of the poorest 40 percent.

Many studies show that rising levels of inequality negatively affects social mobility from the poorer class to consequent higher class. Miles Corak cites (OECD, 2011) to state that rising income inequality "can stifle upward social mobility, making it harder for talented and hard-working people to get the rewards they deserve". The advantages of being top 1 percent are mostly associated with higher quality schooling and better health outcomes and other investments of human capital and these are also passed on from one generation to the other, often limiting social mobility for the masses. (Corak, 2013) has shown that ".... at some point the high levels of earnings accrued by the top 1 percent will be reflected in capital accumulation and eventually lead to stronger intergenerational transmission of wealth". Lack of opportunities for social mobility can create ground for public dissatisfaction and can lead to disastrous consequences in the public life. Experts also argue that a social system with high concentration of wealth can only be economically efficient and politically acceptable if the social mobility is high (Stiglitz and Kanbur, 2016). If social mobility is hindered the social system may not be politically acceptable to the masses. Thus, it is important to ensure that wealth inequality is kept on check with opportunities for social mobility.



# Income Inequalities

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## Consumption and Income Inequality

Between 1995/96 and 2022/23, Nepal witnessed substantial growth in per capita consumption, increasing from Rs. 6,802 to Rs. 130,853 (NLSS, 1996; CBS, 2023)). However, the gap between the richest and poorest 20 percent remains stark. In 2022/23, the wealthiest 20 percent had an annual per capita consumption of Rs. 254,806, compared to just Rs. 57,855 for the poorest 20 percent, which reflects a persistent inequality in living standards (NSO, 2023).

Consumption patterns also contribute further towards the durability of inequality. For instance, in 2022/23, the poorest 20 percent of households spent 56.84 percent of their budget on food, while the richest 20 percent allocated only 32.86 percent—a figure that drops further to 28 percent for Kathmandu Valley's top 20 percent income earners. As a result, wealthier groups can invest in non-food expenses that one, further improve their quality of life, and second, in long-term assets that diversify income sources—ultimately widening inequalities.

## Remittance and Income Inequality

While remittances play a crucial role in raising incomes among Nepal's households, they do not significantly reduce structural inequalities. The percentage of households receiving remittances grew from 23.4 percent in 1995/96 to 76.8 percent in 2022/23. Average remittance per household too has increased from NRS 80,436 in 2010/11 to NRS 145,093 in 2022/23 – an 80.4 percent rise in the past 12 years (NSO, 2023).

On the one hand, households with financial resources to send family members abroad tend to benefit disproportionately from remittance compared to those who are unable to send family members abroad (Salike, Wang, and Regis, 2022). On the other, an increase in remittance income is yet to decrease structural inequalities as remittances have not translated into income diversification. According to Chaudhary (2019), studies by CBS (2011) and NRB (2012 and 2016) indicate that only about 3.5 percent of remittances are invested in productive activities like business ventures, while over 70 percent are used for daily consumption. According to the World Bank (2025), "Most migrants (70 percent) send remittances primarily to support their family's daily consumption. Given high migration costs and Nepali workers relying on high-interest loans to finance their moves, it is not surprising that almost one-fifth of migrants sent remittances to repay their loans. While educational investment is the most cited secondary use of remittances, daily consumption and repaying loans are prominent".

The above data shows that despite high remittances, Nepali households are not able to invest in long term assets or productivity measures, and that most of their income is spent on improving their living standards. Remittance is yet to transform land ownership inequalities, and those from low-income families surviving on remittance income are not able to save enough to purchase land or other long terms assets which would diversify their incomes.

Paradoxically, while land ownership inequalities remain entrenched, ownership of imported goods—such as mobile phones, refrigerators, and motorbikes—has increased, reinforcing both intra-national inequalities (as importers and distributors earn higher incomes) and international inequalities (as Nepal pays for imports from other economies).

The World Bank (2025) also states that an increased reliance on remittances has contributed to the appreciation of the Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER), and is similar to the ‘Dutch Disease’, a phenomenon where large inflows of foreign money hurt domestic industries (especially exports and manufacturing) by making the local currency stronger. Subsequently, instead of increasing domestic employment and productivity, remittance is seen encouraging dependency on foreign income rather than local job creation.

### Gender and Income Inequality

Continuing historical trends, gender gap along income generation continues - males have a total yearly income of NRS 167,483 rupees – more than twice the NRS 74,276 rupees earned by females (NSO, 2023).

On average, men are engaged in 91 days of formal employment per year—more than twice the 43 days recorded for women. On the one hand, this inequality extends to wages, where men earn an annualised daily wage of 74,851 rupees, while women earn only 24,518 rupees. On the other, this figure also highlights the unequal burden of unpaid informal work that disproportionately falls on women.

Income inequality along gender lines extends beyond wages and is also evident in professional roles. In long-term salaried employment, men earn 333,953 rupees annually, compared to 207,477 rupees for women (NSO, 2023). This suggests that gender-based income inequalities persist across all forms of employment, from daily wage earners to salaried professionals.

### Policy Analysis

Since the 1990s, Nepal’s government has been influenced by neoliberal thinking, leading to several structural reforms such as the privatisation of public enterprises, deregulation of the financial market, and easing of import restrictions. Shrestha (2010) argues that IMF-supported structural reforms primarily focused on fiscal austerity, inflation control, and reducing the trade deficit, while economic growth received less attention, and issues of unemployment and poverty were largely ignored. As a result, these market-oriented reforms have exacerbated inequalities between the richest and poorest segments of society.

Table 1: Share in GDP (Percent)			
Sectors	2019/20	2020/21 <sup>R</sup>	2021/22 <sup>P</sup>
Agriculture*	25.16	24.90	23.95
Industry	13.66	13.69	14.29
Service	61.18	61.41	61.76

*Image Source: Nepal Rastra Bank, 2023*

Nepal’s GDP distribution by sector highlights significant structural imbalances: agriculture accounts for 23.95 percent of GDP, industry 14.29 percent, and services 61.76 percent. Despite over 60 percent of Nepal’s population engaging in agricultural activities, the sector contributes less than a quarter to the national GDP, reflecting low productivity. Similarly, the underdeveloped industrial



sector, which accounts for just 14.29 percent of GDP, has led to massive labour migration. Each year, hundreds of thousands of Nepalis, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, seek employment abroad due to the lack of domestic opportunities.

Neoliberal policies have also had uneven effects on the quality and accessibility of public goods, particularly education and healthcare. With minimal incentives for private investment in infrastructure services such as health, education, and telecommunications in remote regions, large populations remain deprived of equal opportunities. Higher education institutions are primarily concentrated in urban areas, forcing families from remote provinces like Karnali and Sudurpaschim to either send their children to distant cities for education or forgo higher education entirely. This dynamic further deepens regional inequalities.

Furthermore, the stark inequality in education costs between private and public institutions exacerbates social stratification. On average, private education costs ten times more than public education (NSO, 2023). This financial burden disproportionately affects low-income families, restricting their ability to invest in their children's education. Consequently, those unable to afford higher education face systemic barriers to securing employment in both the public and private sectors, perpetuating a cycle of inequality.

## **Progressive Taxation:**

Taxes are essential fiscal tools for promoting equitable financial redistribution (KC, 2018). In Nepal, while income tax rates have become more progressive over time, the country still lacks a dedicated wealth tax (SAAPE, 2024). Wealth based taxes are levied on income generated from wealth-based transactions such as capital gains and property transactions.

Despite widespread belief that the wealthy contribute more, a substantial portion of government revenue comes from indirect taxes paid by the general public rather than corporations (Kumar, 2023). In FY 2021/22, corporate income tax contributed only NRS 114 billion, while Rs 229 billion—the majority of income tax revenue—came from individual taxpayers (Kumar, 2023).

The absence of an inheritance tax further entrenches intergenerational wealth inequality, while loopholes in real estate taxation allow the wealthy to accumulate untaxed assets. Additionally, political-business collusion and systemic corruption facilitate large-scale tax evasion. (KC, 2018; Kumar, 2023; Pradhan, 2023).

Nepal's tax system disproportionately benefits the wealthy while placing a heavier burden on lower-income groups. To achieve economic justice, structural reforms are necessary, including progressive taxation, the introduction of an inheritance tax, and stricter real estate taxation.

## **Conclusion**

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Over the past five decades, Nepal has made significant strides in reducing extreme poverty and improving living standards for millions of its citizens. However, the country continues to grapple with deep-rooted income and wealth inequalities that are exacerbated by historical, social, and economic factors. While remittances and economic growth have contributed to poverty reduction, they have not addressed the structural inequalities that perpetuate inequalities between the richest and poorest segments of society. The Fourth National Living Standard Survey (2022/23) highlights



the stark contrast in consumption patterns, land ownership, and access to opportunities between the wealthiest and the poorest households, underscoring the need for more inclusive policies.

The persistence of inequality in Nepal is not merely an economic issue but a multifaceted challenge shaped by historical exploitation and social marginalisation. The impact of neoliberal economic policies on inequality too, perhaps needs to be examined further. The concentration of wealth among the top 20 percent of the population, coupled with the limited access to productive assets and education for the poorest, has created a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. Furthermore, the intersectionality of caste, gender, and regional inequalities continues to exacerbate inequalities, particularly for marginalised communities such as Dalits, women, and residents of the Terai region or from the remote Karnali and Sudurpaschim Provinces.

## Recommendations

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**Reframe the growth debate:** Discussions on economic growth should begin with a focus on the redistribution of *wealth*, not merely the redistribution of *income*. Policymakers must consider mechanisms to tax capital, particularly wealth transfers across generations, to address entrenched inequality.

**Introduce a more progressive tax mechanism:** Implement a fairer tax system that includes higher rates on wealth, luxury assets, and capital gains. Such measures would support a more equitable distribution of resources across society.

**Strengthen tax enforcement:** Closing loopholes and improving tax administration will ensure that the wealthiest individuals and corporations contribute their fair share to public services and social protection systems.

**Expand investment in universal public services:** The state must prioritise sufficient funding for quality public education, healthcare, social protection, and skills development. These services play a critical role in narrowing socio-economic inequalities and addressing gender inequalities.

**Promote structural transformation:** Comprehensive land reform, investment in rural infrastructure, and the creation of domestic employment opportunities are vital to reducing dependency on remittances and labour migration.

**Adopt a relational approach to poverty reduction:** Nepal must go beyond economic metrics and embrace a transformative strategy that dismantles structural inequalities—particularly those rooted in gender, caste, and class. Political inclusion must be at the heart of poverty eradication efforts.

## Case Study: Political Exclusion, Marginalisation, Income Generation and Capital Building

Building on the final recommendation “adopt a relational approach to poverty reduction”, this case study highlights the impact of political exclusion of marginalised communities in income generation and capital building. Mosse (2021) challenges mainstream anti-poverty policies that focus on economic growth without addressing structural inequalities citing a relational perspective on poverty necessitates an examination of power relations and social exclusion. In the context of inequality in Nepal, perhaps the prolonged deliberations surrounding the Citizenship Bill provide valuable insight into inequalities shaped by political exclusion along the intersectionality of gender, caste, and class.

According to the Forum for Women, Law, and Development (FWLD), an estimated 400,000 to 500,000 individuals, despite being born to parents with recognised citizenship, were unable to obtain citizenship themselves due to discriminatory legal provisions. This statistic also encompasses numerous stateless individuals whose mothers are Nepali, but whose fathers are untraceable (FWLD, 2015; Batha, 2023). On 31 May 2023, Nepal's president ratified the Citizenship Amendment Bill, thereby enabling these stateless individuals to apply for citizenship documentation. However, the affected individuals have already endured a decade-long struggle of political exclusion, significantly exacerbating inequalities. While these legal constraints are rooted in patriarchal norms that primarily affect women and gender minorities, they also disproportionately impact an already marginalised community—the residents of the Terai region, which shares a long and open border with India. Nepali political figures, particularly those in the central government, have fuelled anxieties by suggesting that Nepali (read: Madhesi) women may marry Indian men and confer citizenship upon them, leading to an influx of foreigners who could dominate Nepal's demographic and political landscape (Dennis and Lal, 2021; Karki, 2023). This political exclusion has far-reaching consequences, affecting women, their children, and other marginalised populations.

Baranwal, an online reporter for The Kathmandu Post, has highlighted critical barriers imposed by discriminatory citizenship laws, including the denial of equal educational opportunities and restrictions on income-generating activities such as opening a bank account, applying for a Permanent Account Number (PAN), or sitting for public service examinations (Baranwal, 2023). Similarly, Neha Gurung's aspiration to become a doctor was thwarted when she was barred from medical school due to her stateless status (Batha, 2023).

In March 2023, as part of a four-week participant observation study in the Siraha district of Nepal's Madhesh Province, I engaged with two communities: a small-scale landholding farming community and a landless Dalit community. As I investigated, engaged, and examined various aspects of their lived experiences, I raised the issue of acquiring citizenship with members of both communities. Many individuals described prolonged struggles, including multiple visits to

administrative offices and extensive paperwork requirements, such as providing proof of their husband's or father's citizenship. Their need for citizenship as a means of supplementing their income compels me to revisit my fieldwork findings. When asked why citizenship was crucial to them, Dalit 01 (name redacted) stated that it was necessary for ensuring her children's continued education, while Dalit 02 (name redacted) and Dalit 03 (name redacted) required citizenship to become members of the Dalit Mahila Krishak Sangh, which would, in turn, grant them eligibility for a contract farming program – a program which allows landless Dalit families to lease a small scale land farm, supported by the local government. Similarly, Yadav 01 (name redacted) needed citizenship to withdraw remittance funds sent by her brother-in-law. Additionally, her citizenship status was essential for accessing short-term credit, which she had invested in her vegetable farm.

Thus, citizenship, income, and capital-building are intricately linked—both constraining and creating opportunities. The discriminatory Citizenship Bill exemplifies how the denial of citizenship normalises and perpetuates systemic inequalities: class-based inequalities through the restriction of income-generating opportunities, racial inequalities through political exclusion and populist rhetoric, and gender inequalities through patriarchal norms.





# Inequality in Migration

-Deepak Joshi Pokhrel

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## Introduction

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According to International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2008), the change of residence by a person from his or her dwelling to others, within a country or across the border, temporarily or permanently for various reason is called migration. Likewise, Shryock et al., (1975) defines migration as a geographical or spatial mobility by changing residence between clearly defined geographic units permanently. Migration has led the world into an interconnected global village because people leave the place of their birth and move to new place within the boundaries of their country or outsides, thus creates opportunities of attaining education, better job, learning new cultures and languages.

## Historical Background of Migration in Nepal

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Migration from Nepal to abroad is not a new phenomenon. Historically, it is deeply entrenched in the pursuit of economic opportunities. However, the history of formal migration begins in 1814-1816 after Nepal- British India war. Nepali people, as 'Lahure' and British Gorkha, moved to India and Pakistan to serve as army. Most of the literature produced on migration from Nepal has shaped our popular imagination from the Gorkhas or Lahure narratives ( KC, Gaurab, 2018) Beyond this, the Nepali people – as pilgrims, farmers and traders have also migrated and settled in Tibet, Myanmar and Northeast India.

The international migration increased multifold after the restoration of multi-party democracy in Nepal. Internal conflict due to the Maoist insurgency that began in 1996, along with decline in Nepal's carpet industry, motivated people to move to foreign locations. Insurgency and internal conflicts also displaced many people, forcing them to migrate both within the country and to foreign destinations, including India.

According to the 2021 population census, over 2 million Nepalese live abroad with more than 90 percent of them falling within the age group of 14-49 years. Over 530,000 Nepalese have left the country in search of employment during the first eight months ( from mid-July to mid-March) of the current fiscal year 2024/25.(, Republica English daily, 16 March 2025)

The migration trend has been increasing significantly in Nepal and student migrants are vital part of it. Many students tend to move to other countries mostly in the global north to pursue their higher education (Ghimire 2019, Sokout et al., 2020 as cited in Tamang and Shrestha 2021).

Similarly, the internal migration has also increased in Nepal over the years. Due to the migration from rural to urban areas, the population of the urban and semi urban has been growing day by day. The UN 2023- a report within the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) presented that Nepalese net migration number was 5.070 in 2023 with 16.47 percent increase since 2022. The number was 4.353 in 2022 and 2.920 and 3.636 in 2020 and 2021 respectively. Likewise, it also says that around 70 percent of Nepalese people migrate to urban areas for employment so as to improve their economic condition. The data clearly indicates that internal and external migration has been increasing in Nepal.



The internal migration in Nepal is mostly from hill to terai and from rural to urban centers. From the journey of nomadic tribes and soldiers to those propelled by environmental and economic change, migration within Nepal remains interwoven with the issue of ethnicity, social mobility and political representation.

## State Of Inequality In Nepal Due to Migration

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Migration in Nepal- both internal and external- contributes to various forms of inequalities including economic, gender roles and social harmony (Thapa, M, 2025). With one in three household in Nepal receiving remittance, migration impact on income and household decision is significant. About 9.7 of the total remittance receiving household is used on education on health. In fact, remittance has proved to increase the probability of school enrollment by 3.8 percent with 25.3 percent increase in education expenditure improving access to educational opportunities. Furthermore, the remittance receiving households also show an increased spending on higher-priced medical care and higher likelihood of visiting doctor. Likewise, 1 percent increase in overall leads to a 0.099 percent increase in health care expenditure. Moreover, household with at least one member spend 0.27 percent on health care as compared to the households with no migrants. (Rijal, Aarya, 10 August 2022).

When talking about internal migration, the migrants to urban areas have better access to basic service compared to those left behind. For instance, the fertility rate is 2.9 in rural areas compared to 2.0 in urban areas. The use of modern methods of family planning among married women in rural areas is 41 percent slightly lower than the users of urban areas 44 percent. Maternal health and child health indicators are low in rural areas than in urban areas. Child mortality (death per 1000 live birth) is higher in rural areas than in urban and neonatal mortality rate is 26 in rural areas, compared to 16 in urban areas. Infant mortality is in rural areas is 1.36 times higher than in urban areas. Similarly, under-five mortality is higher in rural areas (44) than in urban areas (34) (Ministry of Health, 2016).

Education is the fundamental human right that should be accessible to everyone regardless of However, in Nepal, access to education is not equal between urban and rural areas. (Thapa, Abishek, 2021). In rural areas, access to education remains a significant challenge with many children unable to attend school due to geographic, economic and cultural barriers. The World Bank reports (2022) reports that only 65 percent of children in rural areas attend primary school compared to 90 percent in urban areas.

Likewise, internal migration can also impact social security access because the rights and entitlements associated with one's civic status are often linked to the place of birth or registration, not the place of current residence. It creates challenges for migrants who move to different areas within Nepal as they need to return to their origin to obtain necessary documents or access service (Thapa, 2021).

## Drivers of Migration in Nepal

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While migration is also for seeking better economic opportunities, among the poor, this is often primarily a survival strategy for their families and communities. Women and girls are more likely to be poor despite the significant contribution they make to the economy through unpaid care and

household work (HAMI, OXFAM and SAAPE, 2018). The destruction of livelihood options due to decade long conflicts also forced many people to migrate internally and externally. Environmental crises as a result of recurrent floods, landslides and earthquakes have also been major drivers of migration in Nepal. Migration is closely linked to economic, social educational and environmental factors that impact people's choices. Climate change related disasters also cause forced migration.

The two major drivers of migration are fundamentals of the “push and pull” theory proposed by Lee (1996) encompassing economic, environmental, social and political factors pushing out people from the individual homeland and attracting them towards destinations country (Castelli, 2018). Different social, demographic, economic, environmental and political drivers impose people to move. Whereas some drivers primarily influence the decision to migrate from the place of origin (Castles et al., 2016), improved physical infrastructure at the destination also attracts increasing numbers of people. The push factors are due to the governmental imbalance like unequal access to resources and services termed as macro drivers of mobility. Other push factors include fear of disorder or persecution on grounds of race, religion or politics in the areas people live and inequalities are the meso drivers of mobility (Dubey, 2015).

Labor migration from Nepal to abroad is driven by two factors such as push and pull factors. The push factors are negative factors such as poverty, lack of domestic employment opportunities, conflict and social, political and environmental. On the other hand, pull factors involve the higher demand and wages for skilled and low skilled migrant workers in destination countries (MOLESS 2022). Additionally, the expectation of improved opportunities, such as better jobs, education, living standards, and healthcare, also motivates people to migrate.

There are over 2.2 million Nepalese overseas with 81.28 percent being male 18.72 percent being female (2021) census. According to the department of Foreign Employment, 1931 Nepalese go abroad in search of work every day. In the seven months of the fiscal year 2023/24, 45,552 new and renewed permits were received.

## **Income Inequity Due to Migrants' Remittance**

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The term remittance includes the cash and non-cash items from both formal and informal channels though it is limited to indicate monetary or other cash transfers transmitted by migrant workers. With remittances, the recipient household could increase disposable income and consumption and thereby being resilient with economic shocks (Martin 2001; World Bank, 2011). Further, the remittance and social welfare received by the targeted household, could contribute to poverty reduction in targeted area especially in rural areas (Adams, 2021), produce positive effect on household income risk, investment and production decision, and support family's consumption even during the adverse economic shock. Empirical studies have shown that remittance has been effective in reduction poverty in recipient countries.

Remittance is one of the major source of foreign currency for Nepal even surpassing the amount of foreign aid. (Salike, Nimesh., et al 2022). Remittance inflows to Nepal increased by 16.5 percent to Rs 1445.32 billion during 2023/24 compared to an increase of 23.2 percent in previous years. In the US dollar terms, remittance inflows increased by 14.5 percent to 10.86 billion in the review year



compared to an increase of 13.9 percent in the previous year. In case of Nepal, the scale of labor migration and remittance is big and pervasive. The contribution of remittance on Nepal's GDP is one of the highest in the world which peaked 27.6 percent in 2015. The ratio stands at 24 percent of GDP in 2020 (WDI, 2022). The remittance flow to Nepal was projected to grow moderately at nine percent reaching \$12 billion in 2024.

The remittances sent by the migrant workers have been playing a key role in making Nepalese economy afloat. According to Chaudhary (2022), remittance in Nepal increased drastically starting in fiscal year 1990/2000, topping 10 percent of GDP becoming a significant source of foreign exchange reserves. Fast forward, in the fiscal year 2021/22, Nepal noted NPR 1007.31 billion remittances (NRB 2022) constituting 20.8 percent. This significantly shows that remittance has a noteworthy role in the economic growth of the country and one of the major sources of capital in the context of Nepal. At household level, remittance enables to increase their level of consumption, ensure better health facilities, nutrition, education and other facilities (Khatri, 2017)

About 41 percent, 31 percent and 32 percent of household in the hills, terai and Himalayan region respectively received remittance in 2018 (Byanjekar, Rohan and Sakha, Mira, 2021) About 1 in every 5 household in rural Nepal are poor. The probability of household falling into poverty reduces by 4.8 percent with one percent rise in household assets. Household receiving remittances are 2.3 percent less likely to get caught in poverty as compared to remittance non-receiving household. The probability of household plunging into poverty decreases by about 1.1 percent with every 10 percent increase in remittance inflows to household. In addition, remittance recipient households are 18.4 percent less likely to be deprived of improved drinking water compared to the non-recipient households. It also reduces deprivation on the ownership of household assets by 9.7 percent if the household receives remittance from overseas (Adhikari, 2016).

Along with poverty reduction, the remittances sent by the migrant workers have also laid the foundation in widening the income inequality among the remittance recipient and non-remittance recipient. With remittances, the recipient household increases their disposable income and consumption thereby being resilient with economic shocks (World Bank, 2011). Likewise, the remittance helped to poverty reduction in rural areas and produce positive effect on household income risk, investment and production decision, and support family's consumption even during adverse economic shock.

## Key Points About How Rural-Urban Migration Fuels Inequality

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### Income Inequality due to rural-migration

Rural-urban migration is mainly economically driven. Likewise, food insecurity and lack of employment opportunities, basic services and desertification also drives rural-urban migration. The fourth Nepal Living Standard Survey (2022-2023) reveals significant shift in Nepal's agricultural practices highlighting in number of agricultural household and average holding, changes in crop cultivation and reduction in livestock farming. The Fourth Nepal Living Standard Survey 2022-2023 shows that poverty in urban areas stood at 18.34 percent while it is 24.66 percent in rural areas.



The 2021 Census shows that 77 percent of Nepal's landmass is inhabited by only 46 percent of the population leading to overcrowded cities and difficulties. This results into issues like poor air quality, water scarcity and improper waste disposal. Furthermore, many migrants are unregistered denying them to access to basic health care and other services. They also struggle in finding the suitable employment in urban areas. Many migrants end up working in informal sector where wages are lower and working conditions are often poor exacerbating income inequality. Migrants often encounter challenges when adjusting to a new location. These issues can stem from geographic unfamiliarity and social adjustment difficulties, particularly in culturally diverse destinations. Overcrowding, resource overutilization and environmental strain are common problems in areas with high migration inflow are other problems that deepens inequality (Bohara, 2023).

Urban migration has increased multifold in recent past. In 2020, Nepal's ratio of urban to rural population was 2.920. The national Statistics Office (NSO) reported that 66.17 of the population resided in urban areas. The urban centers offer better employment opportunities contributing to satisfy one's needs. The migrants from rural areas to urban often find low paying jobs while those left behind in rural areas may experience even lower income due to limited employment options in agriculture. With better employment opportunities, the migrants ameliorate their socio-economic status while those left behind lacked these opportunities hindering their economic prosperity. Consequently, this widens the income gap between them.

### **Inequality with respect to access to migrant's health services**

The Sustainable Development Goals 3.8 is to ensure universal health coverage. This means everyone should have access to the health services they need without facing any financial hardship. Nepal is committed to accelerate Universal Health Coverage to ensure equitable access to health services for its citizen (National Health Research Council, 2023/24). Despite this, a large majority of the population mainly rural dwellers face many barriers to access to health services.

Nepal has a critical situation of health inequality as health facilities has not been able to reach the entire population. According to the Nepali Living Standard Survey 2010–2011, only 61.8 percent of household in Nepal can reach the nearest health post within 30 minutes (Cao, 2021). Nepali rural dwellers have geographical disadvantages in terms of accessibility and their income level are lower than those of urban residents drastically reducing their spatial and economic accessibility to health services.

Unlike those who migrate to urban areas, the rural people have to face more problems in obtaining health services. They have higher travel burdens and higher cost than urban dwellers, for health care services. The cost burden of medical travel in rural areas is higher than in cities. Furthermore, the rural areas people face a greater risk for health problem compared to migrants in metropolitan or urban areas. The rural dwellers who account for 49.7 of the total population have poor access to health care. According to BJM Global Health Report, 2021, if motorized transportation is available to everyone, the population coverage within 5 minutes to any public health facilities would be improved by 62.13 percent. (Cao, et. al, 2021).

Nepal's urban population has increased to 27.07 percent while the rural population has decreased between 2011-2021 as people have been migrating to urban areas. The migration and the availability of health care facilities and services are inter-related issues. Low availability of health care facilities promotes migration. In this regard, Suwal (2014) concluded that rural- urban migration occurs

at high level at national level. The rural people have to face more problems in obtaining health services and they migrate to urban areas. There are many disparities found in health indicators between rural and urban areas. The fertility rate is 2.9 in rural areas compared to 2.0 in urban areas. The use of modern methods of family planning among married women in rural areas is 41 percent slightly lower than the users of urban areas 44 percent. Maternal health and child health indicators are low in rural areas than in urban areas. Child mortality (death per 1000 live birth) is higher in rural areas than in urban and neonatal mortality rate is 26 in rural areas, compared to 16 in urban areas. Infant mortality is in rural areas is 1.36 times higher than in urban areas. Similarly, under-five mortality is higher in rural areas (44) than in urban areas (34) (Ministry of Health, 2016). Nepal has made significant progress in WASH access. But inequalities persist between rural and urban areas. According to UNICEF (2019), 86 percent urban households have basic hygiene access compared to 71 percent in rural areas. While 81 percent of the rural areas have basic drinking water, only 13 percent have safely managed water. Menstrual hygiene management is 85 percent in urban while it is 78 percent in rural areas.

## **Housing inequality in urban setting and urban poverty due to migration**

Large number of people migrate from rural areas of the country to urban in pursuit of better living standards. However, the increasing migration trend has created the urban poor in Nepal's major cities who get the opposite of what they migrated for. The World Bank data shows 49.03 percent of Nepal's city population lived in slums as of 2018 (Nepal news, 19 April 2022). 66 percent of Nepal's population is now residing in urban areas as compared to 17.07 percent just a decade ago. Nepal's rapid change in demographics is a major contributor to the creation of urban poor who live in major cities of Nepal with minimum living standards.

Slums lack healthy living spaces and sanitation putting the majority of its inhabitants at high risk of diseases that are deadly. They lack proper legal recognition which hampers effort to improve living conditions and provide necessary services. The slums and squatter settlements are often located in ecologically sensitive and marginal areas such as riverbeds, lowlands and flood prone areas (Muzzini and Aparado, 2013, p 63).

Affordable housing is right protected by the act in Nepal. According to the Right to Housing Act, every citizen shall have the right to an appropriate housing. The UN Habitat national report in 2016 highlights the concerning issue of decreasing access to shelter for the poor in urban areas. This is primarily due to limited access to land and essential services. Furthermore, the rising housing prices have rendered housing unaffordable for growing number of families with low income. Likewise, according to Nepal Population and Housing Census, 2021 (national report) out of a total of 4, 474, 699 household in urban municipalities, 1,026, 199 household (22.93 percent) have housing units made of mud-bonded bricks or stone (NSO, 2023). The census also says that 125, 055 household (2.79 percent) in urban municipalities have roof made of thatch or straw. This is a grave challenge to improve the quality of housing in urban areas.

Over the years, the migration from rural areas to urban areas has drastically increased in Nepal. Apart from other challenges faced by the migrant, housing is key problem. The housing in urban areas has been becoming unaffordable for low-income households. Such a situation is seen more apparent in capital city, Kathmandu. The sudden increase in population overwhelms the capacity of cities to provide essential amenities such as housing, water supply, sanitation and transportation. As a result, the urban faces shortages of affordable housing options leading to the proliferation



of informal settlements and slums. The Kathmandu valley is a case in point. Many people from across the country migrate to Kathmandu in with an objective of better living standards.

Consequently, it has created immense pressure on housing option for low-income people creating disparities in accessing the services. The concentration of migrants in urban areas often leads to overcrowding and overburdened public services. The insufficient provision of health care facilities, education, employment opportunities deepen socio-economic inequalities within the urban communities. The strain on resources and services also affects overall livability and quality of life for urban dwellers hindering their socio-economic well-being.

Furthermore, the slum dweller also end up being marginalized with plethora of problems including limited access to employment, education, and basic services. At the same time, the slums are overcrowded and filthy and prone to natural disaster especially flood and inundation as they are mostly situated on the riverbanks.

There is no accepted definition of urban poverty in Nepal. In many cases, the social researchers have recognized the poor urban communities are those living in the slums and squatter settlements (permanent, semi-permanent, or temporary or illegal or legal) either in the open space or religious sites or on the banks of river.

A survey report on urban poverty states that about 64 percent of the households of urban poor in Kathmandu are migrant mostly from outside the valley. A great majority of them come from rural hills. Nepal's rural poverty has been in constant decline while urban poverty has been on the rise people continue to migrate to urban centers to improve their livelihood. The fourth Living Standard Survey 2022-23 released revealed that urban poverty in the country rose to 18.34 percent in 2022-23 from 15.46 percent in 2010-11 (NSO, 2023). On the other hand, it showed rural poverty has decreased from 27.43 percent in 2010-11 to 24.66 percent in 2022-23. The reason for growing urban poverty is the migration from rural to urban areas seeking better educational, health and job opportunities. Likewise, a rapid change in demographics is also major contributor of creation of urban poor who live in major cities of Nepal with minimum standards.

It is a common knowledge that people migrate to cities in search of better opportunities, infrastructure, and education and health facilities. Similarly, when people are dissatisfied with their limited lives in remote places, they seek refuge in cities and urban areas. But the bitter reality is that only a handful of people who make transition earns a proper living while others may end up in slums with poor sanitation, inadequate shelter and dirty potable water leading to what is being called urban poor.

The urban poor are vulnerable to natural hazards because of informal settlements in marginal areas, poor quality of housing and lack of assets to assist in their recovery. In addition, they are subject to harassment by the local authorities under various alibis. The cost of living in urban is very high as compared to rural areas and as a result the urban poor cannot afford a minimum amount for health and live a minimally comfortable life.



## Migration Induced Gender Inequality

Gender plays a pivotal role in shaping migration trends with foreign migrants exhibiting a relatively balanced distribution between sexes- approximately 56 percent being men (ILO, 2015). However, labor migration from Nepal reveals a significant gender inequality with almost 90 percent of the country's labor migrants being men (Rajkarnikar, 2020). As indicated by data from the country profile of Nepal by the IOM, nearly 92 percent labor migrants are men, about 59.1 percent fall within the 15 to 29 age group and an additional 31.9 percent are between 30-44 years old, (ILO, 2022). As large majority of the migrants are male, the female look after the household chore and other responsibilities (Rijal, Arya, 10 August 2022)

Every year, Nepalese are propelled to migrate to foreign countries due to lack of employment opportunities and the possibilities of higher paying jobs in the destination country. In fact, more than 1700 Nepalese travel abroad for employment daily. According to census 2021, a total of 2.2 million Nepalese are abroad, out of which 81.28 percent are male 18.72 percent are female.

Migration, for a family, is a transformative process that reshapes family structure and changes roles and responsibilities with regards to household responsibilities and agricultural activities in rural areas. Since over 81 percent of the total migrants are men, the impact of outward migration of males on wives and other females of the household are huge. A woman living without husband are exposed to social stigma from community members and her movement is restricted by gender norms unless accompanied by her mother in- laws with whom she often lives. Likewise, she is also exposed to climate change induced disaster as she has to work at the agricultural field for longer duration. Furthermore, as such, women rarely own land and rely on day-to-day labor for their sustenance, they are exposed to drought and floods.

In terms of gender relations, the migration of male members can be disempowering for women. Those left behind have greater responsibilities ranging from household chores to social activities. Without male members, they find difficulties to balance responsibilities and decision making of looking after the household assets. Socially, they are perceived with negative perception and vulnerable to sexual exploitation (Sherpa, et al, 2021).

## Policies Related to Foreign Migration

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Article 17.2(e) of the Constitution of Nepal 2015 guarantees the fundamental freedom to move and reside in any part of Nepal. The constitution also guarantees the right to seek employment opportunities and education and guarantees right regarding labor. The government has adopted the Foreign Employment Act 2007 and Foreign Employment Regulation in 2008. But the Foreign Employment Act has not addressed the issues of labor migration to India.

Further, the Nepalese government adopted Foreign Employment Policy (FEP) in 2012. It highlights the development of skills and safe migration of Nepalese migrant. It signed a memorandum of understanding with Malaysia (2018) Jordan (2017), Israel (2015), Bahrain (2008), Qatar (2005), UAE (2007), South Korea (2007) and Japan (2009). It also has signed bilateral agreement with major destination countries with an objective of promoting the rights, safety, dignity and prosperity of Nepali migrant workers. But the Foreign Employment Policy has not been amended since it was established in 2011 despite there is a provision of amendment of the policy in every five years.

There is no urgency shown by the concerned authority to amend the Foreign Employment Policy and incorporate the basic principles of Global Compact for Migration, Abu Dhabi dialogue and Colombo process. It is essential to address the concerns regarding wage theft, recruitment, compensation during the times of pandemic, voting rights of the migrant workers and access to justice in the destination countries and in Nepal as well.

Nepal is also part of several international organization/ treaties which protects migrant workers like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, the international convention on civil and political rights, 1966, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966, Global Forum on Migration and Development, New York Declaration of Refugees and migrants 2016, Abu Dhabi Dialogue, and Colombo Process, and Sustainable Development Goals 2016-30. The government has also started several initiatives like Prime Minister Employment Program, Employment Service Centre and Vocational and Skill Development Training Academy.

The major gaps in implementation of migration policies in Nepal include lack of effective enforcement of existing policies, inadequate protection of migrant workers during recruitment and overseas employment, poor re-integration of returnee migrants, limited access to justice for migrant workers facing exploitation, and lack of awareness and training for stakeholders regarding migrant rights mainly concerning gender-based violence issues in migration.

## Recommendations

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### Following is the key recommendation:

- Develop a Comprehensive Framework to address inequalities resulting from rural-urban migration. There is a need to develop a clear and structured framework with specific indicators to identify and explain the growing inequality as a result of rural/hill migration. It should be integrated into national policies and guarantee that the challenges such as decline in agricultural productivity, rural depopulation and abandonment as a result of rural-urban migration are duly addressed.
- Develop well defined guidelines for integrating Gender and Social and Social Inclusion into migration related plans, policies and program. And, revisit the migration related policies, plans and program and make changes in line with the present context.
- Conduct a mapping survey and establish a provision to extend civil registration of informal urban settlers to increase their coverage to basic services including health.
- Effective implementation of local development plans and programs to generate employment opportunity at the local level preventing rural-urban migration. For this, a dedicated fund management could play a cardinal role.
- Impact analysis and data management. The vulnerable groups including women, children and elderly people. The increasing number of men migrating across the border to find work leaving women with all the care and household responsibilities exposes them to vulnerabilities resulting from climate change induced disasters. This widens the inequalities. Hence it is important to assess the inequalities as result of migration from the lens of GESI.



- It is equally important to foster the coordination and collaboration among different levels of government and civil society organizations for integrating migration induced inequalities reduction strategies into national and local plans.
- Empowerment of local communities is also very important in reducing the inequalities resulting from rural-urban migration. This will help local communities to voice their challenges, integrating their perspectives into national and international migration related policies, and ensuring that financial and technical support reaches them.
- Transformation of rural settlements into smart village can help retain local population and prevent haphazard and unorganized urbanization
- Management of migrant workers with systemically keeping the records. Likewise formulate a national migration policy and hire workers at the destination areas to help Nepali migrants.
- Employ those who are registered at the Employment Service Center as unemployed in project operated by the public and private sectors. Finally make labor monitoring effective.

## Conclusion

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This paper looks into the inequalities resulting from migration- both internal and external. It assessed the inequalities from the perspectives of income, climate, urban poverty, slum and squatters and urbanization. The prime interest was to shed light how rural-urban migration is fueling inequalities between the migrants and those who are left behind. Likewise, the other interest was to assess how the remittance send by the migrants have been widening the gap between remittance receiving group and remittance non receiving group. In addition, it has shed light on the care economy and inequalities from the gender perspectives.

It has been found that remittance has helped in the reduction of poverty ratio by 5.3 percent but deepened the poverty gap by 7.3 percent and severity by 9.2 percent. In terms of in inequality, remittance has helped to inequality within the remittance receiving group. However, it also contributed to rising income inequality when compared to non-remittance receiving group. Similarly, it also has been found that the rural migration has fueled inequality between migrants and non-migrant in terms of access to basic services and income etc.





# Inequality in Politics

-Dipesh Ghimire, PhD

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# Introduction

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Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic and diverse country. It has a long history of political and structural inequality deeply rooted in its social, cultural and political structure. The journey of the country from a monarchical to a federal democratic republic in 2008 marked a significant milestone in its political progress (Gautam and Poudel 2022). While inequality persists, significant progress has been made in recent years in addressing these inequalities. For instance, women's participation in the parliament has increased from less than 5 percent before the republic era to 33 percent today. Similar positive trends can be observed among Dalits and other marginalized groups, reflecting the impact of inclusive constitutional provisions and political reforms. These developments indicate that Nepal has taken notable steps toward inclusion, though challenges remain in ensuring equitable representation and dismantling deeply embedded structural inequalities. However, Nepal continues to tackle with deep-rooted inequalities which manifest in various dimension of political and structural spheres like economic opportunities, access to political representation, social services etc. (Sapkota, 2023). Furthermore, Political and structural inequality is shaped by historical hierarchies, including regional disparities, gender inequalities, ethnic inequalities, caste-based discrimination, religious beliefs, and inequalities in wealth, as defined in global and regional discourse. These factors have perpetuated exclusion and marginalization of various groups communities of people in the country. . Nepal's history of hierarchical social stratification is based on the Hindu caste system and ethnic divisions. It has translated into a modern context where marginalized and socially excluded groups, such as women, Dalits, Madhesis, and indigenous people, experience limited access to political power, and opportunities (Gellner, 2007). Tamrakar (2019) strongly argues that gender bias, and inequalities remain a major concern, with women facing significant challenges in political participation, economic independence, and decision-making process in Nepal.

Political inequality refers to systemic disparities in access to decision making process, and representation and participation in governing and administrative political positions, institutions and sectors. In the other hand structural inequality relates to the systemic barriers embedded in political, economic, social, and legal institutions that weakens or excludes or marginalizes certain groups over others (Lust, 2021). The interplay of caste, ethnicity, religion, region, and gender has historically shaped the socio-political landscape of the country, resulting in systemic discrimination that persists despite various reform efforts (Darity and Ruiz, 2024).

Dalits, indigenous peoples (*Janajatis*), and women are historically marginalized and excluded, relegating them to lower socio-economic status in Nepal. It directly limits these groups' representation in governing and administrative political structures (Gurung, 2022). Despite constitutional provisions aimed at promoting inclusivity like proportional representation in provincial and federal parliaments, quotas in local governments, and affirmative action policies in civil service, the reality remains starkly different. The political representation of marginalized communities has improved significantly compared to the pre-republic period, but these groups are still excluded and underrepresented in political structures and decision making. Similarly, the World Bank (2024) study shows that socio-economic inequalities based on caste, gender, region, and ethnicity are widespread in Nepal's development sector. Neoliberal economic policies implemented since the 1980s have further entrenched these inequalities by prioritizing market-oriented reforms over state intervention aimed at equitable resource distribution (Oxfam, 2019). As a result, wealth



remains concentrated among a small elite group while large segments of the people continue to live in poverty.

Inequality undermines democratic principles and fuels social unrest, as seen during the Maoist insurgency, Madhes Movement, and other political upheavals in Nepal (Riaz and Basu, 2007). Addressing political and structural inequalities is crucial for Nepal's development. The World Bank highlights that between 40 percent and 60 percent of total inequality in South Asia is driven by circumstances beyond an individual's control, such as family background, place of birth, ethnicity, caste, and gender (World Bank, 2023). These factors significantly impact individuals' access to political representation and decision-making process. Moreover, the demand for inclusion in political discourse is a consequence of perceived deep structural inequalities (World Bank, 2016). Addressing these inequalities is essential for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs). In this context, this study aims to highlight the political and structural inequalities in Nepal and explore possible ways forward.

## Global and Regional Discourse on Political and Structural Inequality

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Political and structural inequalities are not only local phenomenon; however, these are deeply interconnected with global and regional systems, orders, and institutions which extend inequalities in society. The global narrative evolved significantly over recent decades. Increasingly, scholars and policymakers recognize that inequality is a multifaceted phenomenon which exceeds national borders. The rise of neoliberal economic policies since the 1980s has intensified income and wealth inequalities on a global scale, mostly affecting the global South (Oxfam, 2014). The concentration of wealth among a small elite group has led to a situation where the benefits of economic growth are not equitably distributed, which directly support to rise the social tensions and political instability in developing countries (Brookings Institution, 2023). While global and regional discourse primarily shows inequalities driven by wealth and income disparities. It also acknowledges the role of caste, race, ethnicity, and gender-based discrimination in shaping systemic exclusion.

Political inequality refers to unequal access to governing and administrative political power and decision-making positions, where some groups dominate political institutions while others remain underrepresented (Verba, 2003). Structural inequality, on the other hand, is a system of entrenched inequalities that determines who has access to power, resources, opportunities, and public services often perpetuated through policies, institutional norms, and historical patterns of discrimination (Tilly, 1998). Political and structural inequalities manifest through embedded gender discrimination, caste systems, and ethnic inequalities in South Asia. Political institutions often fail to address the needs of marginalized and socially excluded groups, leading to a cycle of disenfranchisement (UNDP, 2024). For example, despite constitutional guarantees for representation and rights for Dalits and indigenous populations in Nepal, actual political participation remains very limited (Gurung, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified existing inequalities in South Asia (Development Initiatives, 2023).

Several global policies and systems contribute to the perpetuation of political and structural inequality. First, neoliberal economic policies have prioritized deregulation and privatization,

often undermining public welfare systems that support marginalized and socially excluded communities (Oxfam, 2014). This erosion of public services has a direct impact on key dimensions of the Human Development Index like health, education, and income, which are often foundational prerequisites for meaningful political participation. When marginalized groups lack access to these essential services, their ability to engage in politics, compete for leadership positions, or even understand and influence policy processes is significantly constrained. Second, the rise of multinational corporations has concentrated economic power in fewer hands. This concentration allows corporations to influence political decisions that favor their interests over the marginalized and excluded population (Development Initiatives, 2023). Third, international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank often impose structural adjustment programs that prioritize austerity measures over social investment, exacerbating inequalities in recipient countries (UNDP, 2024).

A report by Oxfam (2019) argues that inequality in all its forms is the defining global problem and increasingly the defining political problem of contemporary time. The UNDP emphasizes that governance systems often fail to respond adequately to the unequal distribution of income and wealth, leading to political and structural inequalities (UNDP, 2024). Oxfam's report focuses that rising inequality threatens not only economic stability but also democratic governance (Oxfam, 2014).

Global systems and institutions can perpetuate systemic political and structural inequalities through various mechanisms. International financial institutions often promote policies that may not align with the social, economic, cultural, and political realities of developing countries. Differing mandates and funding modalities of international institutions have led to challenges in addressing structural and political blockages in Nepal, which exacerbate existing inequalities and hinder effective governance (International Alert, 2011). Similarly, the integration of developing economies into the global market can lead to unequal benefits. The World Social Report 2020 shows that globalization has contributed to rising inequalities within countries, as the gains from global economic integration are unevenly distributed (United Nations, 2020).

Many countries experience frequent changes in leadership. For instance, Nepal has seen numerous prime ministers since the restoration of parliamentary democracy, reflecting deep-rooted political instability and it contributing to political and structural inequalities (Le Monde, 2024). Bogati and Cox (2017) also argues that identity politics and the quest for recognition among diverse ethnic groups have led to both progress and tension in Nepal.

The global and regional contexts of political and structural inequality show complex interdependencies that shape the experiences of socially excluded and marginalized communities in Nepal. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies aimed at reducing inequality.



# Political and Structural Inequalities situation in Nepal

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Nepal is a country of extensive ethnic, cultural, regional, linguistic, and religious diversity. The National Population and Housing Census of 2021 recognized 142 caste and ethnic communities, as well as 124 languages, 10 religions and 60 ethnic groups where everyone has their own identity, history and originality which is unique and diverse in Nepal (CBS, 2021).

Nepal has long grappled with political and structural inequalities rooted in its historical caste-based hierarchies, geographic disparities, gender discrimination etc. Despite transitioning to a federal democratic republic in 2015, systemic inequalities persist. Socially excluded and marginalized communities continue to face barriers in political representation in Nepal. The 2024 BTI Transformation Index notes that socioeconomic inequalities based on gender, caste, ethnicity, language, region, and sexual orientation remain structurally ingrained and pervasive in Nepal (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024). Political inequality is further evidenced by the underrepresentation of excluded and marginalized communities in key government institutions. Despite affirmative action policies, elite groups continue to dominate political spaces and civil services as well. Electoral systems, bureaucratic hurdles, and social stigmas discourage active participation from disadvantaged groups, leading to a cyclical pattern of exclusion (Gurung, 2022). The government's federalization process aimed to address political and structural inequality related issues; however, resource constraints and political instability have hampered progress (Gyawali, 2018).

The primary communities affected by political and structural inequality in Nepal include Dalits, indigenous groups, Madhesis, Muslims, people from Karnali and Sudurpashchim provinces, women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and rural populations (GESI Working Group, 2022). These groups continue to face systemic marginalization and exclusion across multiple sectors, including education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. Empirical evidence shows that deeply rooted socio-cultural hierarchies and institutional barriers limit their access to power, resources, and opportunities. The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2024, which assesses the quality of democracy, market economy, and governance in developing and transition countries, notes that long-standing social hierarchies in Nepal continue to restrict access to political influence and economic opportunities for many marginalized groups (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024).

This study primarily focuses on political inequalities in Nepal. It refers to the disproportionate representation of certain groups in government structures, access to power, and political participation. While political and structural inequalities encompass broader systemic disparities across economic, educational, healthcare, employment, and wealth distribution sectors, the following sections mainly deal with inequalities within the political system of Nepal, especially in civil service representation.



## Inequality in Civil Service in Nepal

Table 1 Representation of Caste/Ethnic Group in Civil Service in Nepal

Communities	Population Percentage	Participation Percentage
Madhesi Brahmin	0.8	3.3
Khas Brahmin Kshatriya	31.20	61.15
Newar	5	69
Other Madhesi	14.5	9.7
Indigenous Nationalities	23.5	13.6
Tharu	6.6	3
Muslim	4.4	0.7
Dalit	13	1.4

**Source:** Sunam 2020 cited in Bhul (2025)

The above table clearly shows that inequalities in Nepal's civil service, where historically dominant groups like Khas Brahmin/Kshatriya and Newars enjoy disproportionate representation, holding 61.15 percent and 69 percent of positions despite their smaller population shares. In contrast, marginalized and excluded groups like Dalits, Muslims, and Indigenous people remain severely underrepresented. It reflects systemic exclusion from state institutions in Nepal. Dalits, who comprise 13 percent of the population, hold only 1.4 percent of civil service positions, illustrating entrenched discrimination and limited access to opportunities.

## Inequality in Political Parties in Nepal

The representation of the Dalit community in the central committees of the country's major political parties is extremely weak. Table 2 clearly illustrates this.

Table 2: Dalit Representation in Central Committee of different Political Parties

S.N.	Name of Political Parties	Central Committee	Dalit Representation (percentage)
1	Nepali Congress	148	11 (7.43)
2	CPN (UML)	301	20 (6.64)
3	CPN (Maoist Centre)	236	23 (9.74)
4	CPN (Unified Socialist)	335	17 (5.07)
5	Rastriya Swatantra Party	40	3 (7.5)
6	Janata Samajwadi Party, Nepal	446	19 (4.26)
7	Democratic Samajwadi Party	215	10 (4.65)

**Source:** Biswokarma et al. (2023)

The representation of Dalits in the central committees of major political parties remains very low. Across all parties, Dalit representation hovers around 4 percent to 10 percent, with the CPN

(Maoist Centre) having the highest representation at 9.74 percent, while the Janata Samajwadi Party, Nepal, has the lowest at 4.26 percent. Mainstream parties such as Nepali Congress and CPN (UML), which hold significant political influence, have only 7.43 percent and 6.64 percent Dalit representation. Despite constitutional commitment to social inclusion, these data show the ongoing marginalization of Dalits in key positions of political parties in Nepal. Similarly, Table 3 clearly shows the women representation in political party's central committees.

**Table3: Women Representation in Political Party Central Committees**

S.N.	Name of Political Parties	Total Member	Women	Percent
1	Nepali Congress	166	54	32.5
2	CPN (UML)	345	117	33.91
3	CPN (Maoist Centre)	409	135	33
4	Janata Samajwadi Party	325	73	34
5	Rastriya Prajatantra Party	345	80	23
6	Rastriya Swatrantra Party	61	22	36
7	Nagarik Unmukti Party	25	6	24
8	Janamat Party	216	45	20.8
9	Bibeksheel Sajha Party	37	11	30

**Source:** Giri (2024).

The above table clearly shows the women participation across different political parties in Nepal. The Rastriya Swatantra Party has the highest percentage of women representation at 36 percent, followed by the Janata Samajwadi Party with 34 percent, and CPN (Maoist Centre) and CPN (UML) at 33 percent and Nepali Congress with 32.5 percent. On the other hand, the Janamat Party and *Nagarik Unmukti* Party have the lowest representation at 20.8 percent and 24 percent respectively.

**Inequality in Federal, Provincial and Local Level Political positions in Nepal**

There are disparities and inequalities in the representation of different gender and caste/ethnic groups in House of Representatives through the First Past the Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) systems in the 2022 General Election of Nepal. Table 4 clearly shows the distribution of seats among various social groups, reflecting the inclusivity and diversity within Nepal's legislative body.

**Table 4: Representation of different gender and caste/ethnic groups in House of Representatives through FPTP and PR (2022 General Election)**

Caste/ Ethnicity	FPTP		Total ( percent)	PR		Total ( percent)	Total		Total ( per- cent)
	Men	Women		Men	Women		Men	Women	
Khas Arya	91	4	95 (57.58)	8	27	3 5 (31.82)	99	31	1 3 0 (47.27)
Indigenous People	33	2	35 (21.21)	5	26	3 1 (28.18)	38	28	66 (24)

Madhesi	25	2	27(16.36)	4	13	17 (15.45)	29	15	44 (16)
Dalit	1	-	1 (0.61)	7	8	5 (13.64)	8	8	16 (5.82)
Tharu	6	1	7 (4.24)	1	5	6(5.45)	7	6	13 (4.73)
Muslim	-	-	-	3	3	6(5.45)	3	3	6 (2.18)
Total	156	9	-	28	82		184	91	275
Percent- age	94.55	5.45	165 (100)	25.45	74.55	110 (100)	66.91	33.09	100

**Source:** Biswokarma et al. (2023)

Table 4 shows the political inequalities in House of Representatives of Nepal. The dominance of the Khas Arya group, holding 47.27 percent of total seats despite constituting a smaller percentage of the population. In contrast, marginalized and excluded groups like Dalits, Muslims, and Tharus remain underrepresented. For example, Dalits hold only 5.82 percent of seats, with just one representative elected through the FPTP. Similarly, Indigenous Peoples and Madhesi groups have better representation through the PR system compared to FPTP. Furthermore, gender inequality is another important issue, with women making up only 33.09 percent of total seats, despite constitutional provisions aimed at ensuring their participation. The severe contrast in FPTP elections, where women represent just 5.45 percent of elected candidates, underscores the persistent challenges they face in directly contesting elections. Even within the PR system, women's representation (25.45 percent) remains far below parity. The situation in the 2022 provincial elections appears to be almost the same as at the federal level. Table 5 clarifies this.

**Table 5: Representation of various caste/ethnic groups in seven provincial assemblies (2022 General Election)**

Caste/ Ethnicity	FPTP		Total	PR		Total	Total		Total	( per- cent)
	Men	Women		Men	Women		Men	Women		
Khas Arya	155	5	160	13	62	75	168	67	235	42.73
Indigenous People	75	6	81	9	59	68	84	65	149	27.82
Madhesi	55	2	57	6	24	30	61	26	87	15.82
Dalit	2	1	3	4	24	28	6	25	31	5.64
Tharu	18	-	18	1	9	10	19	9	28	5.09
Muslim	11	-	11	1	8	9	12	8	20	3.64
Total	316	14	330	34	186	220	350	200	550	-
Percentage	95.76	4.24	100	15.45	84.55	100	63.36	36.36	100	100

**Source:** Biswokarma et al. (2023)

Table 5 clearly shows the significant political and structural inequalities in provincial assemblies. It reflects the disproportionate representation of various caste and ethnic groups in provincial



assemblies. The Khas Arya, who are dominant group, hold the highest representation at 42.73 percent, with a substantial gender disparity (28.51 percent) of their total representatives are women. Indigenous people are underrepresented at 27.82 percent, with a similarly low proportion of women. The Madhesi community, which has long faced systemic marginalization, accounts for only 15.82 percent of total representation. Dalits, the most socially, culturally, and economically marginalized and excluded group, have the lowest representation at 5.64 percent. It shows the structural barriers to political participation. The Tharu and Muslim communities also remain significantly underrepresented, with 5.09 percent and 3.64 percent representation, respectively. Gender inequality is stark across all groups, with men occupying 63.36 percent of total seats, underscoring the structural barriers faced by women in political participation. Similarly, the situation at the local government election in 2022 also appears to be the same. Table 6 clarifies the political representation of the local governments.

**Table 6: Representation of various caste-ethnicity in important position in the local governments in Nepal (Local Government Election, 2022)**

Caste/ Ethnicity	Mayor and Chair			Deputy Mayor and vice Chair			Ward Chairs		
	Men	W o m - en	Total	Men	W o m - en	Total	Men	W o m - en	Total
Khas/Arya	346	15	3 6 1 (47.94)	103	247	3 5 0 (46.48)	2968	25	1 9 9 3 (44.39)
Indigenous People	214	7	2 2 1 (29.35)	68	149	2 1 7 (28.82)	2005	26	2 0 3 1 (30.12)
Madhesi	118	2	1 2 0 (15.94)	7	103	1 1 0 (14.61)	1056	9	1 0 6 5 (15.79)
Dalit	8	-	8 (1.06)	2	11	1 3 (1.73)	145	2	1 4 7 (2.18)
Tharu	28	1	2 9 (3.85)	2	43	4 5 (5.98)	313	5	3 1 8 (4.72)
Muslim	14	-	1 4 (1.86)	3	15	1 8 (2.39)	187	2	1 8 9 (2.80)
Total	728	25	753	185	568	753	6674	69	6743
Percentage	96.68	3.32	100	24.57	75.43	100	99.01	1.02	100

**Source:** Biswokarma et al. (2023)

The 2022 Local Government Election shows that the significant political and structural inequalities in Nepal. The data indicates that the Khas Arya group holds an excessively high number of key positions, with 47.94 percent of mayor/chair positions and 46.48 percent of deputy mayor/vice-chair roles, far exceeding their demographic proportion in the country. Similarly, they dominate ward chair positions, holding 44.39 percent of the total seats. In contrast, historically marginalized and excluded communities like Dalits and Muslims remain severely underrepresented. Dalits hold only 1.06 percent of mayor/chair positions and 1.73 percent of deputy mayor/chair positions. It shows the constant barriers in accessing leadership positions.

Gender disparities are also evident, with men overwhelmingly occupying leadership roles across all caste and ethnic groups. Women hold only 3.32 percent of mayor/chair positions and just 1.02 percent of ward chair roles. Even in deputy positions, where inclusive efforts are typically stronger, women’s representation stands at 75.43 percent. Indigenous groups and Madhesi communities fare slightly better in representation compared to Dalits and Muslims, yet their presence is still not proportionate to their population size.

## Drivers of Political and Structural Inequality in Nepal

The caste system in Nepal has historically privileged certain groups while marginalizing others. For instance, Dalits are facing systemic discrimination, exclusion, limiting their access to resources, employment, education, and political participation. The 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices shows that structural barriers and discrimination force Dalits into low income (United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2023).

The diverse topography of Nepal also contributes to significant regional inequalities. Remote areas often lack essential infrastructure and services, exacerbating inequalities between urban and rural populations. The World Bank (2023) reports that these areas experience limited governmental presence and uneven development. Geographic barriers, including poor road networks and inadequate connectivity, exacerbate inequalities in access to political participation and decision-making process (World Bank 2019). For instance, rural populations have a higher poverty incidence compared to urban centers, reflecting the persistent regional imbalances (CBS, 2021). The study indicates that while national poverty rates have declined, marginalized groups in remote regions continue to face entrenched social exclusion (Tiwari and Uematsu, 2016).

Similarly, gender inequality also remains a pressing issue in Nepal. Despite legal provisions for gender equality, women and non-binary persons often encounter systemic barriers in political spheres. The Global Gender Gap Report 2022 ranks Nepal 96<sup>th</sup> among 146 countries. It reflects persistent gender disparities (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024). Women and non-binary individuals face systemic exclusion from political spheres despite legal mandates for inclusion. Cultural norms and social practices continue to hinder women’s participation in political position, governance and decision-making process (Pokhrel and Pradhan, 2020). The Nepal Human Development Report (UNDP, 2020) shows that rural women experience lower literacy rates and fewer opportunities than their urban counterparts. Furthermore, deeply ingrained patriarchal values restrict women’s agency, reinforcing structural inequalities (Shrestha, 2024). Table 7 provides a detailed account of the factors causing political and structural inequality and their impact.

**Table 7: Key Contributing Factors and Impacts of Political and Structural Inequality in Nepal**

S.N.	Factors	Description	Impacts
1	Historical Exclusion	The legacy of caste-based privileges perpetuates political and structural inequalities, systematically excluding marginalized groups from power and resources.	Continued marginalization of historically disadvantaged groups, preventing them from accessing political power, education, and economic opportunities, and perpetuating cycles of poverty.



2	Geographic Disparities	The lack of infrastructure and political representation in remote areas leads to uneven development and limited access to government services, reinforcing regional disparities.	Limited development in remote areas, resulting in poor infrastructure, lack of services (e.g., healthcare, education), and unequal economic opportunities, deepening regional poverty and inequality.
3	Gender Discrimination	Political and structural barriers, shaped by patriarchal norms, limit women's participation in political decision-making and leadership roles, reinforcing gender inequality.	Exclusion of women from political leadership and decision-making, leading to policies that fail to address their needs and interests, and reinforcing gender-based inequalities in all sectors.
4	Gender Inequality	Institutionalized gender biases in political and economic systems restrict women's rights, access to resources, and opportunities for social mobility.	Women's restricted access to resources, education, and employment opportunities lead to economic dependence, limited political participation, and perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination in decision making process.
5	Sexuality Inequality	LGBTIQ+ individuals face legal and societal barriers, with limited political recognition and protection, further entrenching their exclusion from the mainstream political and economic spheres.	LGBTIQ+ individuals face discrimination in employment, legal recognition, and healthcare, resulting in social isolation, lack of support, and the continuation of stigmatization.
6	Caste Inequalities	Dalits are systematically excluded from political representation and decision-making processes, and face structural barriers in accessing education, employment, and justice.	Dalits face exclusion from essential services and opportunities, resulting in persistent poverty, limited access to justice, and lack of political representation, reinforcing social hierarchies.
7	Age Inequality	The political system often overlooks the needs of specific age groups, such as the elderly, youth, and children, resulting in limited access to education, healthcare, and social welfare.	Marginalized youth, elderly, and children face barriers to education, healthcare, and social protection, preventing their full participation in society and limiting their prospects.
8	Abilities Inequality	Persons with disabilities face structural barriers in accessing political participation, education, and employment, which marginalize them socially and economically.	People with disabilities face barriers to education, employment, and social inclusion, leading to higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and social isolation.



9	Regional equality	In-	The political and structural neglect of regions like Madhes and Karnali contributes to persistent economic and social marginalization, limiting access to resources, representation, and development opportunities.	Persistent poverty and underdevelopment in regions like Madhesh and Karnali due to inadequate political representation and investment in local infrastructure and services, exacerbating social and economic disparities.
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**Source:** content analysis (2025)

Several factors drive inequality in Nepal, including governance challenges, economic disparities, cultural norms, and the legacy of conflict. The Atlantic Council reports that Nepal's poor governance track record is characterized by inadequate leadership and corruption, which exacerbate inequalities (Querenet, 2020).

Similarly, elite control over political power, unequal access to quality education, and the poor implementation of policies and laws further contribute to political and structural inequalities. The concentration of power among a small political elite limits broader participation and representation, reinforcing systemic exclusion. Inaccessible or poor education affects marginalized communities and contributes to the enlarging inequality. Similarly, despite progressive legal frameworks, weak enforcement of policies fails to address existing inequalities effectively.

Economic inequality is influenced by income disparities and unequal access to assets in Nepal. Oxfam's report on fighting inequality in Nepal highlights that income disparities and unequal access to assets are driving greater inequality in the country (Oxfam, 2019). Nepal's economic growth has been uneven, benefiting urban elites while leaving rural, marginalized and excluded communities behind. The wealth gap has widened over the past decade, as reported by the World Bank (2019) shows the need for more inclusive economic policies. Similarly, traditional patriarchal values continue to marginalize and exclude women and minorities, creating additional barriers to their inclusion in political processes (Tamang, 2017).

The political and structural inequalities intersect with economic, health, and educational disparities, creating complex layers of poverty and injustice Oxfam (2019). For instance, women from Dalit communities face compounded challenges due to both caste and gender-based discrimination. The U.S. Department of State's 2023 report shows that structural barriers and discrimination force Dalits into low income and dehumanizing employment, with women often facing additional gender-based challenges (United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2023).

## Constitutional and Policy Provisions in Nepal

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 marks a significant shift toward inclusiveness and rectifying historical inequalities. Article 18 of the Constitution guarantees the right to equality, asserting that no one shall be discriminated against based on caste, religion, gender, ethnicity, or disability (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Similarly, Article 42 emphasizes the importance of social and economic justice for women, Dalits, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized communities, offering affirmative action and special provisions for their inclusion in various public spheres, including politics,

education, and employment (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). These articles represent a constitutional commitment to eliminate discrimination and promote social justice across all sectors of society.

The Constitution also promotes proportional representation in the political sphere to ensure that historically marginalized and excluded groups have a voice in the national decision-making process. Article 84 guarantees the participation of women in the legislature by reserving at least 33 percent of seats for female candidates through the proportional representation system. Similarly, the Constitution mandates the inclusion of Dalits, indigenous groups, and other marginalized communities, both at the federal, provincial and local levels of governance. This provision is aimed at countering the dominance of upper caste and male dominated political structures.

Furthermore, Nepal has established a range of legal mechanisms designed to address political and structural inequalities. The Civil Service Act (1993), the Local Government Operation Act (2017), and the Election Act (2017) are among the key legal instruments that promote inclusiveness. These laws mandate the inclusion of marginalized groups in public offices and local government positions through quota systems. The Civil Service Act reserves position for women, Dalits, and indigenous groups, facilitating their entry into government services. Likewise, the Local Government Operation Act requires that women hold at least 40 percent of local government positions including 20 percent reserved for Dalit woman, and that marginalized groups have representation in local governance bodies, ensuring the inclusion of a diverse range of voices at the grassroots level.

Similarly, the Election Act (2017) promotes the proportional representation of various groups in political party's structures as well as parliamentary elections. The system is designed to rectify historical injustices by providing equal opportunities for marginalized communities to secure representation in the national legislature. This system, though a significant step forward, still faces challenges in achieving full inclusiveness, particularly in rural and remote areas where deep-seated prejudices persist.

Despite the existence of international conventions, Constitutional provisions, and legal frameworks, political and structural inequalities remain widespread in Nepal. The constitution guarantees equality, but deep-rooted social hierarchies and political centralization have hindered the full implementation of these provisions. The political structure is still dominated by a small number of elites, leaving many communities, especially those in remote areas, underrepresented and excluded from decision making process and political position. Marginalized and excluded groups continue to face significant challenges in accessing political power. Despite constitutional efforts towards inclusion, women, Dalits, and other minority groups still have limited representation in the civil services. These structural inequalities, driven by historical and social discrimination, continue to limit equal opportunities for all citizens, thereby impeding true political and structural inclusion in Nepal.

## Conclusion

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Political and structural inequalities continue despite the adoption of international conventions, Constitutional provisions and laws aimed at promoting political and social inclusion. Marginalized groups like Dalits, women, indigenous communities, Madhesi, Muslim, and other minorities continue to face significant barriers to full participation in political life. This exclusion is reflected in the underrepresentation of these groups within political parties, governance structures, decision-making processes.



While Nepal has made notable progress toward a more inclusive society particularly through legal reforms such as the Constitutional guarantees of proportional representation, recognition of marginalized groups, and affirmative action in civil service. However, these gains are uneven and insufficient. For instance, women's representation in the federal parliament increased from less than 5 percent before 2006 to 33 percent today, and Dalits, who were once almost invisible in decision making roles, now hold reserved seats at local and provincial levels. Similarly, access to education and health services has improved for marginalized communities and changing social norms has led to greater public discourse on inclusion and rights.

However, these developments have not fully dismantled entrenched systems of exclusion. The inconsistent implementation and weak enforcement of inclusive policies continue to undermine progress. Similarly, gender, caste, ethnic, and geographic factors further entrench disparities and inequalities in Nepal. An action-oriented approach is required to dismantle the structural barriers that prevent the full participation of marginalized and excluded groups in all spheres of society. Only through consistent implementation of inclusive policies and equitable opportunities can achieve true political and structural equality for all its citizens.

## Recommendations

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- i) Implement stricter quotas and expand the current quota for Dalits, women, and indigenous groups in political parties and other public offices.
- ii) Ensure leadership positions e.g., mayor/chairperson, deputy mayor\chairpersons, and ward chairpersons for marginalized and socially excluded communities, especially Dalits in line with their population proportion. Similarly, adopt a proportional electoral system to ensure fair representation of all citizens, particularly marginalized and socially excluded communities, in governance structures.
- iii) Increase targeted investment in remote and underdeveloped provinces like Sudurpashchim and Karnali to enhance access to political opportunities at the federal level. Strengthen decentralization by providing local governments with greater financial and decision-making authority to ensure policies address the specific needs of geographically marginalized and socially excluded communities.
- iv) Implement legislative changes to ensure gender equality in governing and administrative political structures, not just through proportional representation but through mandatory quotas for leadership positions at all levels of governments.
- v) Develop policies specifically aimed at enhancing the capacity of rural women, including access to decision making process and political power in the governance and administrative structure and institutions. Provide targeted training and capacity development programs in leadership, governance, and political participation to equip women and marginalized community with the necessary women with the necessary tools to take on political leadership roles.
- vi) Strengthen the enforcement of laws that prohibit discrimination on the grounds of caste, ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. Ensure that marginalized and excluded groups have access to legal redress for violations of their rights.



- vii) Develop policies that encourage political parties to adopt more inclusive platforms by offering financial incentives or public recognition for promoting diversity in their candidates. Additionally, implement community-driven development initiatives that actively involve marginalized and socially excluded groups in decision-making processes.
- viii) Extend legal protection and social support for the LGBTIQ+ community, including access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities.
- ix) Establish an independent institution tasked with monitoring the implementation of inclusion policies and tracking progress on political and structural equality.
- x) Foster greater public participation in policy design, especially for marginalized and socially excluded communities. This could involve community consultations, public hearings, and town hall meetings to ensure that the voices of those who are typically excluded are heard in the political position and decision-making process.
- xi) Ensure equitable access to quality education for all, equipping individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate fully in social, political, and economic institutions.

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## Thematic Writers' Bio

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**Dr. Dipesh Kumar Ghimire** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Tribhuvan University, Nepal. He has over 18 years of experience working in the fields of civic engagement, social protection, democracy, good governance, election systems, and Civil Society Engagement. His research and publications are centered on citizens' movements, democracy, social inclusion, governance, civic engagement, and anti-corruption. Ghimire has a deep understanding of the complexities of political participation, democracy, social movement, civic and democratic space, and advocacy. Ghimire has published Seven books and several articles from national and international journals. Ghimire completed his PhD in Sociology from Tribhuvan University Nepal in 2023.

**Deepak Joshi Pokhrel** has over a decade working experience in NGOs in the areas of democracy, human rights, governance, gender-based violence and transitional justice. He also has been contributing as a weekly columnist for national English weekly since long. His article covers democracy, geopolitics, human rights, governance, election, gender-based violence and anti-corruption. Till date, he has authored over 172 newspaper articles covering above outlined issues. This is not to say that he does not write on contemporary issues. He does and he is committed to write till he breathes his last. He also has a substantial experience as a consultant in the realm of communication and documentation and has independently developed several annual reports of INGOs operating in Nepal. He also has worked a lead researcher on issues such as democracy, peace and transitional justice in Nepal and has assisted several research on these issues. In addition, he has co-authored a book on local governance and anti-corruption. Apart from his professional career as a political columnist for national English weekly, he has been contributing as a Guest Editor of national level English Journal since long. He is a fellow of Swedish Institute Leadership lab.

**Dr. Laxmi Tamang** holds a Master of Public Health and a PhD in Gender and Power Relations in Sexual and Reproductive Health from Australian universities. A Nepal-trained nurse and Australia-educated public health practitioner, she has over 20 years of leadership across clinical, development, and academic sectors.

A trailblazer in women's health, she founded and led Nepal's first independent nurse-led birthing center in 2007. Building on this experience, she recognized the critical need for professional midwifery standards and spearheaded the establishment of the Midwifery Society of Nepal in 2010—the country's first professional association for midwives. Since 2023, she has served as the South-East Asia Regional Board Member of the International Confederation of Midwives, advocating for sexual and reproductive health rights across the region.

Dr. Tamang is deeply committed to systemic change, collaborating with civil society organizations to advance the rights of women and girls. As visiting faculty at Manmohan Memorial Institute of Health Sciences and the National Academy of Medical Sciences, she mentors the next generation of health leaders. Her career bridges grassroots innovation with policy reform, driving evidence-based, rights-centered solutions for marginalized communities.'

**Pankaj Thapa** is the founder and editor of Aawaaj News and Research, a Kathmandu-based independent platform dedicated to socio-political research. With a career that spans journalism, public relations, content strategy, and reputation management, he has worked extensively with not-



for-profit organisations across key development sectors—including water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), preventable blindness, poverty alleviation, and climate change.

At the heart of Thapa's work is a commitment to amplifying the voices of marginalised and underrepresented communities. His editorial focus lies in exploring socio-political interconnections, with the goal of understanding marginalisation both as a historical process and in its contemporary forms. Through Aawaaj News and Research, he seeks to foster critical discourse and advance social justice narratives rooted in evidence, empathy, and lived experience.

Mr. Thapa holds an MSc in Media and Communications from the London School of Economics. His dissertation examined the political implications of climate change on marginalised communities, with a case study focused on the Siraha District in Nepal's Terai region. A passionate field researcher, he has travelled to 66 of Nepal's 77 districts—often on assignment—and carries with him stories (and evidences of inequalities) from nearly every corner of the country.

**Raju Sharma** is a seasoned development professional with over 15 years of expertise in governance, democratization, civic engagement, private sector development, and sexual and reproductive health rights. Holding a Master's degree in Public Policy and Governance from North South University, Bangladesh, and a Master's Degree in Anthropology from Tribhuvan University, Nepal, he combines academic rigor with practical experience.

Currently serving as Project evaluation lead, Raju has led numerous evaluations, baseline surveys, and policy research projects for international development organizations. His work spans thematic areas such as agri-business development, Inequality as an outcome of development, inclusive governance, and public-private partnerships, with a focus on marginalized communities and gender equality.

As a freelance consultant, Raju has designed training modules, facilitated workshops, and authored policy papers and manuals. His publications include analyses of federalism, social entrepreneurship, child rights, and public-private collaborations. Fluent in Nepali, English, Hindi, and Bengali, he is also a co-founder of Unnat Neeti Institute, a policy think tank in Nepal.

**Rishi Adhikari** is a dedicated development practitioner with an MPhil in Development Studies from Kathmandu University, Nepal. With over 12 years of rich experience in climate change and disaster risk management, his work is grounded in a strong foundation of humanitarian response. His expertise spans climate and environmental crises, climate financing, loss and damage, resilient livelihoods, and disaster risk reduction (DRR).

He has consistently provided strategic leadership in project implementation, case story development, and knowledge productions and dissemination on climate change adaptation and DRR. He has also extended technical support on climate change adaptation (CCA) and DRR to numerous national and international NGOs, including the NGO Federation of Nepal. He served as Program Coordinator at Mission East for five years, where he led the Climate Change Adaptation and DRR portfolios, ensuring strategic oversight of a diverse program portfolio. Earlier, at KIRDARC, Rishi played a pivotal role over five years in leading advocacy and empowerment programs focused on building community resilience in the Karnali region.

In his most recent role as Program and Thematic Lead for Climate Change Adaptation and Livelihoods at Islamic Relief Nepal, Rishi championed climate-smart agriculture, green economy practices, disaster preparedness, and humanitarian support.

**Dr. Rupa Munakarmi** earned her PhD from the School of Education, Kathmandu University (KUSOED) in 2024 under a Danish fellowship, following the completion of her MPhil from the same institution in 2015. She has 20 years of teaching experience in schools and colleges. Her academic journey is rooted in a passion for child-centered, justice-driven pedagogy. Since 2014, she has served as a visiting faculty at KUSOED, through courses such as Research, theories and practice in education, and Academic writing. She also actively supervises thesis research for Master's and MPhil scholars.

She has also led numerous research and evaluation projects in collaboration with national, international, and UN-affiliated organizations. Her work spans a wide range of focus areas, including inclusive education, public financing in education, policy development, parental engagement, integrity, and child rights. She has worked with organizations such as the NGO Federation of Nepal, Consortium Nepal, Curriculum Development Centre, CEHRD, Education Watch Group, Loo Niva, GoodWeave etc. Through these partnerships, she has contributed to research studies, policy advocacy, training programs, and the development of publications such as annual reports, educational manuals, and operational guidelines. Most notably, she served as the thematic writer and lead consultant for the Country Inequality Report (CIR) 2025.

**Dr. Sanjay Hamal**, earned his PhD in Education from Kathmandu University School of Education (KUSOED) specializes in educational governance and policy development. His doctoral research, supported by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, investigates the dynamics of school governance. His academic journey also includes a Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) in Education and Development Studies and a Master of Arts (M.A.) in Rural Development.

Dr. Hamal's professional trajectory encompasses roles as a Research Associate at the National Planning Commission (NPC) of Nepal, contributing to policy briefs, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) progress reports, and sectoral reviews. With a strong background in program coordination and leadership, Dr. Hamal has also worked with organizations such as Green Foundation Nepal, Children as Zones of Peace National Campaign, and a program coordinator in the World Social Forum (WSF) 2024 Nepal.

Dr. Hamal serves as a visiting faculty member at KUSOED, Patan Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, and an adjunct faculty member at Presidential Business School, where he fosters academic excellence in teaching and research. His scholarly contributions include publications on educational policies, development policies, everyday informal practices, SDGs, public health, etc., and presentations at international conferences. Dr. Hamal's research agenda focuses on the intersection of education, policy, and social development, with particular emphasis on the Nepalese context and its regional implications.



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