



## **Assessing Gender Equality in Nepal: A Comparative Study of Progress and Disparities**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the current state of gender equality in Nepal, emphasizing key aspects such as economic involvement, education levels, health, and political empowerment. Its main goal is to evaluate Nepal's progress using recent secondary sources, including the Global Gender Gap Index 2025, the Nepal Economic Survey 2023/24, and national reports on gender-based violence and policy enforcement. By examining gender parity scores and comparing Nepal's position with other South Asian nations, the research seeks to uncover gaps, contradictions in policies and practices, and potential pathways for reform. The research uses a descriptive and comparative approach, analyzing secondary data. Quantitative metrics like global gender rankings, parity scores, labor force participation, civil service representation, and violence statistics are examined to evaluate Nepal's progress. These figures are compared with similar data from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, and the Maldives to gain regional insights. Additionally, the study reviews policy documents and national survey reports to understand the policy responses and structural challenges women face in Nepal. Findings indicate that Nepal has achieved moderate progress in health and political representation but still significantly trails in economic participation, placing 140th out of 148 countries. Despite implementing gender-responsive policies and specific employment initiatives, women's involvement in the labor force remains limited, with ongoing structural barriers like social norms, legal shortcomings, and ineffective enforcement. Meanwhile, countries such as Bangladesh and Bhutan demonstrate stronger performance in political empowerment and economic inclusion, providing valuable lessons for Nepal. The study concludes that Nepal's



gender equality policies should extend beyond token representation and budget allocation to focus on comprehensive institutional reforms and social change. To bridge the gender gap and promote inclusive development, it is vital to enhance implementation, enforce accountability, and incorporate regional best practices.

**Keywords:** gender equality, Nepal, political representation, economic participation, gender-based violence

## **Introduction**

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and essential for sustainable development and inclusive governance. In Nepal, gender inequality persists deeply rooted due to historical patriarchy, caste hierarchies, feudal social structures, and social-political exclusion (Chetri & Karki, 2024; Sijapati, 2019). While Nepal has achieved notable progress in recent decades, especially after the 2015 Constitution formalized gender inclusion and proportional representation, significant gaps remain across social, economic, and political spheres (Bhandari, 2023; Gautam, 2023).

According to the National Population and Housing Census 2021 report, published by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in 2024, Nepal's total population reached 29,192,480, comprising 14,939,929 (51.17%) females and 14,253,551 (48.83%) males, resulting in a sex ratio of 95.4 males per 100 females. This demographic shift reflects factors such as increased female life expectancy and male out-migration. Despite their numerical majority, women in Nepal still face disparities in education and employment. The national literacy rate is 76.3%, but a closer look shows a gender gap: 83.6% of men are literate compared to only 69.4% of women (NSO, 2024).

Occupational segregation is also present: women mainly work in agriculture, forestry, and fishing, making up 62% of employed women while men are more concentrated in construction, trade, and transportation sectors. Alarming, over 52% of women work as unpaid family laborers compared to only 19% of men, further highlighting the gendered nature of economic exploitation and invisibility in national accounts (NSO, 2024). These data show that despite their numerical presence, women's social and economic status remains structurally marginalized in Nepal.

Recent demographic and socio-economic trends show a complex picture. Gautam (2023) highlights that Nepal's gender gap in literacy has significantly decreased over the past two decades, with female literacy rising from 32.0% in 2001 to 69.4% in 2021. However, gender-specific barriers to higher education and skilled employment still exist, especially in rural regions (Shrestha & Rijal, 2024). Although more girls are attending school, dropout rates remain higher for females due to early marriage, household responsibilities, and financial difficulties (Acharya, 2024). Similarly, despite improved access to education and training, women's workforce participation stays around 26%, mainly in unpaid or informal roles (Paudel, 2019).



Women's access to leadership and decision-making roles remains restricted. Although the constitution requires 33% female representation in federal and local bodies, many women elected to office hold token or less influential positions (Manandhar, 2021). In academia and public administration, gender gaps continue at senior levels, with men predominantly occupying managerial and executive roles (Shrestha & Rijal, 2024; Gautam, 2023). Additionally, ongoing wage disparities, occupational segregation, and restricted access to credit and land ownership further deepen women's economic marginalization (Lamsal & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2023).

The geographical, caste, and ethnic aspects of gender inequality are also prominent. Women from Dalit and Janajati communities in rural areas face higher rates of exclusion, domestic violence, and child marriage (Gupta et al., 2021; Chetri & Karki, 2024). In remote regions like Karnali and the Far-Western provinces, multidimensional poverty more severely impacts women and girls, restricting their access to essential services such as healthcare and education (NGO Federation of Nepal, 2025). A study by Nepal Economic Forum (2023) reveals that only 17% of women in isolated districts own land or property in their names, despite legal reforms that secure these rights.

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a significant concern. KC, KC, and Poudel (2024) examined the extent and details of domestic violence against women in a Lalitpur community during the COVID-19 lockdown. Through a descriptive cross-sectional study and interviews with 74 married women, they found that 31.1% faced domestic violence, including emotional (37.7%), economic (23%), physical (31.1%), and sexual (8.2%) abuse. Contributing factors included confinement with the abuser, financial stress, and family conflicts. The study also identified significant links with the husband's employment, education, and violence history. It highlights the urgent need to bolster support systems to protect women in crises like pandemics. According to Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2022, about 27% of Nepali women aged 15–49 have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence by an intimate partner, which is similar to the global average of 27% and slightly lower than South Asia's regional rate of roughly 33–35% (WHO, 2021; MoHP & New Era, 2022). These figures emphasize the importance of comprehensive policy reforms, gender-sensitive budgeting, and ongoing advocacy to uphold women's rights and dismantle systemic barriers.

Although Nepal has made notable progress in gender equality, especially in political representation and primary education, ongoing gaps in literacy, employment, and safety still impede advancement. A stronger commitment to data-driven monitoring, institutional responsibility, and intersectional gender mainstreaming is crucial for turning these numerical gains into real gender equality.

Despite numerous women's empowerment programs, ranging from microfinance to vocational training, long-term progress remains obstructed by structural challenges. While some women have benefited by acquiring skills or entering entrepreneurial fields, these efforts are often urban-focused and do not reach marginalized rural communities (Lamsal & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2023; Gautam, 2023). Furthermore, reliance on donors and fragmented



implementation have reduced the effectiveness of many gender development initiatives (Acharya, 2024; Bhandari, 2023).

This study assesses Nepal's gender equality status through the lens of the Global Gender Gap Index, focusing on education, health, economic participation, and political empowerment. Using updated secondary data from various sources, it maps existing gender disparities and situates them within broader South Asian and global contexts. The analysis highlights the urgency of integrated policy frameworks and robust implementation to advance gender equality.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a secondary data analysis to critically assess gender equality indicators in Nepal within a South Asian regional context. The methodology used a robust framework for secondary data analysis, outlining the systematic approach to data collection and evaluation. To enhance clarity, the selection of data sources was guided by predefined criteria, including relevance to the research objectives, credibility of the source (e.g., peer-reviewed publications, government databases, or reputable organizations), and data completeness. Key datasets include the Global Gender Gap Index 2025, Nepal's Economic Survey 2023/24, and publications from the National Statistics Office (NSO), the Labour Force Survey, the NDHS, and reports from UN Women. These sources were chosen for their methodological rigor, comprehensiveness, and the availability of gender-disaggregated data.

The analysis focuses on four key aspects of gender equality: education (including literacy rates, school enrollment, and educational achievement), health (covering maternal mortality, life expectancy, and nutritional status), economic participation (such as labor force involvement, wage equality, and occupational segregation), and political empowerment (measured by women in parliament, ministerial positions, and local government roles). These areas align with the Global Gender Gap Index framework and correspond with national policy priorities.

To contextualize Nepal's performance, a regional comparative framework was used. Gender indicators from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives were gathered and analyzed to reveal both absolute and relative trends. This comparison helps identify structural strengths, weaknesses, and policy lessons for Nepal.

Quantitative data were examined through descriptive statistics to identify trends, disparities, and relationships between sectors. The comparison involved using performance rankings and indicator scores to evaluate Nepal's position in South Asia. The analysis was driven by data triangulation principles, which enhanced accuracy by cross-checking findings from multiple sources. This method provides a solid, evidence-based perspective on gender equality in Nepal and delivers policy-relevant insights to promote inclusive development.

The analysis focused on data spanning the latest five years to ensure relevance and alignment with current trends. To address data inconsistencies, such as discrepancies in reporting formats or missing values, a standardized data cleaning process was employed, involving cross-verification with multiple sources, imputation of missing data where

appropriate using statistical techniques, and exclusion of datasets with irreconcilable inconsistencies.

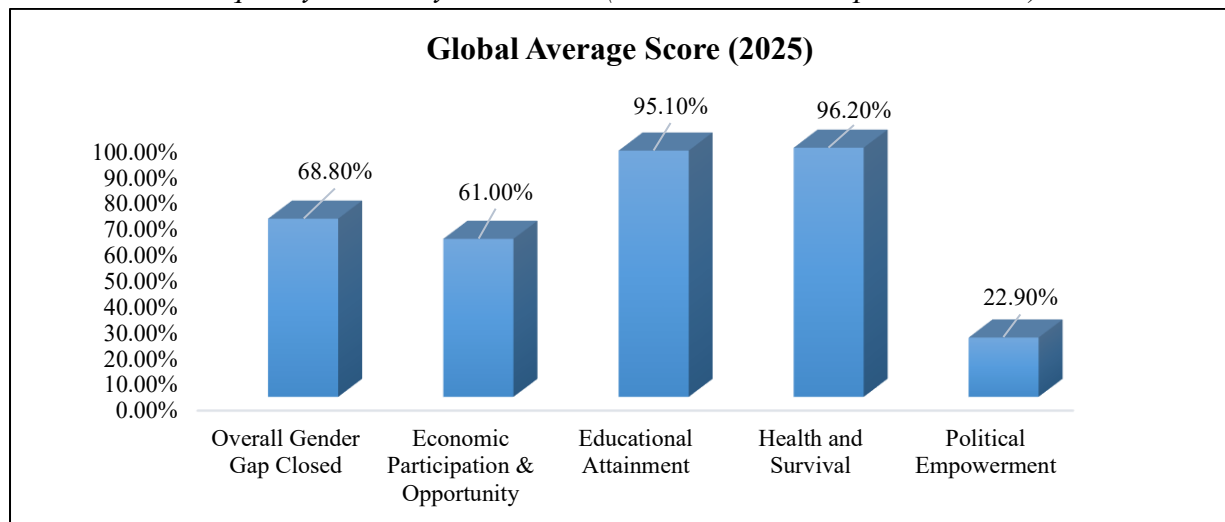
## Results

### *Global and Regional Gender Gap Trends*

The Global Gender Gap Report 2025 states that 68.8% of the overall gender gap has been closed worldwide. Although nearly equal in Health and Survival (96.2%) and Educational Attainment (95.1%), significant gaps still exist in Economic Participation and Opportunity (61.0%) and Political Empowerment (22.9%). Iceland leads globally, having closed 92.6% of its gender gap for the 16th straight year. Other top countries include Finland (87.9%), Norway (86.3%), the United Kingdom (83.8%), New Zealand (82.7%), Sweden (81.7%), the Republic of Moldova (81.3%), Namibia (81.1%), Germany (80.3%), and Ireland (80.1%). These nations consistently show strong policies and outcomes supporting gender equality across economic, educational, health, and political areas (World Economic Forum, 2025). The Figure below displays the average global scores for each of the four major categories measured by the 2025 Global Gender Gap Index, illustrating how much progress has been made worldwide.

**Figure 1**

*Global Gender Equality Scores by Dimension (Global Gender Gap Index, 2025)*



Source: Global Gender Gap Index, 2025.

In 2025, Southern Asia is ranked 7th out of eight regions in the Global Gender Gap Index, with an overall gender parity score of 64.6% (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2025). Of the seven South Asian nations, only Bangladesh (77.5%) ranks among the top 50 globally (24th). The region faces ongoing challenges in Economic Participation and Opportunity, with a low parity score of 40.6%, despite notable progress in increasing senior worker (+9.1%) and technical professional (+17.2%) representation. However, estimated earned income parity has decreased by 7.8 percentage points. In Educational Attainment, Southern Asia performs better, with a score of 95.4%, though disparities persist: countries like Nepal and Pakistan have literacy parity scores below 75%, while the Maldives has achieved full parity. In Health and Survival, the regional score is 95.5%, indicating minimal gains in healthy life expectancy but



setbacks in the sex ratio at birth. For Political Empowerment, the region scores 26.8%, a modest rise from 21.9% in 2006, yet only Bangladesh has attained gender parity in the head-of-state role. Parliamentary parity remains very low in Bhutan and the Maldives, each scoring under 5% (WEF, 2025). The table below provides a comparative overview of gender equality in South Asian countries based on the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) 2025, showing each country's regional and global rankings out of 148 nations, along with their gender gap scores.

**Table 1**

*Gender Gap Rankings in South Asia: Comparative Regional and Global Positions (2025)*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Regional rank</b>	<b>Global Rank/148</b>	<b>Score</b>
Bangladesh	1	24	0.775
Bhutan	2	119	0.663
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>0.648</b>
Sri Lanka	4	130	0.645
India	5	131	0.644
Maldives	6	138	0.626
Pakistan	7	148	0.567

Source: Global Gender Gap Index, 2025.

***Patriarchy and Gender Norms in Nepal***

Dahal et al. (2021) identified that patriarchal norms, early marriage, and household responsibilities significantly lead to high dropout rates among girls in Nepali high schools, especially in rural regions. These structural obstacles hinder girls' educational access despite policies aimed at gender parity. Chetri and Karki (2024) discuss how class, gender, and patriarchal systems historically marginalized women in ancient Nepal, systematically excluding them from political, economic, and religious spheres. Uprety (2024) examines how patriarchal frameworks in Nepal reinforce male dominance by positioning men as decision-makers and authority figures, while cultural and institutional mechanisms legitimize women's subordination. Gurung (2024) points out that gender stereotypes still impede women's progress in Nepal by restricting their roles in economic and social areas. The article stresses the importance of implementing gender-sensitive policies and awareness initiatives to challenge ingrained biases and foster inclusive development.

Adhikari and Sigdel (2024) contend that gender roles in Nepal are socially constructed rather than biologically inherent, reinforced through daily social practices, cultural norms, and interactions that uphold gender inequality in both public and private domains. Adhikari et al. (2024) examine the historical evolution of societal perceptions of sexuality in Nepal, revealing that although ancient texts acknowledged diverse sexual identities, contemporary Nepal still grapples with stigmatization and restricted gender rights, highlighting a tension between tradition and modern gender views. K. C. (2025) investigates how women politicians in post-conflict Nepal maneuver within and challenge patriarchal structures in political institutions. Despite greater representation, they encounter systemic obstacles like



tokenism, marginalization from decision-making, and pressures to conform to male-dominated norms.

Nepalese society is firmly grounded in patriarchal norms that primarily establish men as dominant over women across various aspects of life (Gurung, 2024). Gender roles are clearly outlined, with women mainly regarded as caregivers and homemakers, while men are seen as primary earners. These traditional expectations are further supported by religious, cultural, and legal systems (Acharya & Bennett, 1981). Such norms have played a role in the systemic marginalization of women, especially within Dalit and Janajati communities, who encounter intersectional discrimination rooted in caste, ethnicity, and gender (Thapa, 2013).

### ***Economic Participation and Opportunity***

Women's economic involvement in Nepal is still limited compared to men. By 2024, only 27.6% of women are part of the labor force, versus 53.7% of men (World Bank, 2024). The rate of vulnerable employment, defined as jobs lacking security and social protections, is substantially higher for women (91.2%) than for men (71.5%) in Nepal, exceeding the South Asian averages of 76.2% and 65.3%, respectively (World Bank, 2024). Additionally, between 2016 and 2024, just 10% of new company owners were women, placing Nepal in the lowest global category for female entrepreneurship. Financial inclusion remains low, with 49.9% of women having a financial account compared to 58.6% of men, below the South Asian average (World Bank, 2024). Nonetheless, 47.8% of married women report sharing or having sole decision-making power at home, indicating a positive trend in agency (World Bank, 2024). According to the 2021 census, male and female participation in economic activities among those aged 10 and above was 52.6% and 47.4%, respectively. The Nepal Population and Housing Census 2021 reports that out of 6,666,937 households, 68.45% are led by men and only 31.55% by women, highlighting a notable gender imbalance in household leadership (NSO, 2024). This disparity indicates underlying social norms and structural inequalities that restrict women's participation in decision-making and household authority, especially in rural and traditionally patriarchal areas.

Despite some progress, Nepali women's economic participation remains low. Many women are involved in unpaid care work and informal jobs with little protection or benefits (UN Women, 2021). Nepal's women's economic engagement is among the lowest in South Asia. The Economic Survey 2023/24 reports that while 55% of women work in agriculture and informal sectors, their access to credit, land ownership, and formal employment opportunities is restricted (Ministry of Finance, 2024). Women are disproportionately involved in unpaid caregiving and underrepresented in decision-making roles. The gender wage gap hovers around 30%, according to the same survey. The Global Gender Gap Index 2025's Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex ranks Nepal at 140<sup>th</sup> position out of 148 countries, highlighting a significant gender gap in economic involvement. The following table compares Nepal's rank and score with other South Asian countries to illustrate this regional disparity.



**Table 2**

*Economic Participation & Opportunity in South Asia (2025)*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Global Rank/148</b>	<b>Score</b>
Bangladesh	141	0.457
Bhutan	76	0.693
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>0.460</b>
Sri Lanka	128	0.54
India	144	0.407
Maldives	136	0.507
Pakistan	147	0.347

Source: Global Gender Gap Index, 2025.

The Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex of the Global Gender Gap Index 2025 underscores notable gender disparities in South Asia, particularly in labor force participation, wage equality, and opportunities for women to advance. The rankings show that South Asian nations typically encounter considerable obstacles in bridging the economic gender gap. Bhutan ranks highest among these countries at 76<sup>th</sup> worldwide with a score of 0.693, showing relatively better gender parity in economic participation and opportunity. Sri Lanka follows with a rank of 128<sup>th</sup> and a score of 0.540, indicating moderate advancement in women's access to employment and economic roles.

Nepal ranks 140<sup>th</sup> position with a score of 0.460, just behind Bangladesh (141<sup>st</sup> position, 0.457), Maldives (136<sup>th</sup> position, 0.507), and India (144<sup>th</sup> position, 0.407). These rankings reveal ongoing economic inequalities, including lower female labor force participation, wage gaps, and underrepresentation in top roles. Pakistan holds the lowest position in the region at 147<sup>th</sup> rank with a score of 0.347, indicating significant structural barriers to women's economic involvement. While Nepal has made some progress in other gender equality areas, its low score shows that economic participation is still a major hurdle. This highlights the need for targeted policies to improve women's access to quality employment, equal pay, and leadership roles, especially in sectors with notable gender disparities.

### ***Educational Attainment***

Women globally make up about 49.6% of the population (UN DESA, 2023), while in Nepal, females slightly outnumber males, accounting for 51.17% of the 29.19 million people (NSO, 2024). Despite this demographic advantage, women often face unequal opportunities in education, employment, and decision-making. Gender disparities in education are still significant; Nepal's female literacy rate is 69.4%, whereas males have a literacy rate of 83.6% (NSO, 2024). The 2011 census reported an overall literacy rate of 65.9%, with males at 75.1% and females at 57.4% (CBS, 2011). Although progress has been made, the gender gap in literacy remains a challenge.

Nepal's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST, 2023) reports a primary education Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 1.02, suggesting slightly more girls are enrolled than boys. This parity declines at the secondary level, where the GPI is 0.96. Net





enrollment rates for basic education are comparable, with girls at 94.7% and boys at 93.9%. Despite these gains, dropout rates for girls remain high, especially in rural and marginalized areas, driven by early marriage, household duties, menstrual stigma, poverty, and safety concerns at schools (MoEST, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Gender disparities are also noticeable in educational employment. Women make up 43.2% of primary teachers, but their share decreases to 27.4% at the secondary level (MoEST, 2023), revealing ongoing gender imbalance in leadership and professional positions within education. South Asia has seen significant progress in educational attainment. By 2023, nearly equal completion rates for lower secondary education are observed, with 78.2% of girls and 77.6% of boys finishing this level, figures that are consistent with global averages (World Bank, 2024). Although these data indicate that gender parity in school enrollment at the lower secondary stage has largely been reached, literacy disparities persist. The adult literacy rate remains highly gendered, with 82.3% of men and only 67.5% of women being literate, 14.8 percentage point gap that exceeds the global gender gap of 6.5 points (World Bank, 2024). These differences highlight that, despite improvements in access to formal education, inequalities in lifelong learning and literacy development continue to hinder women and girls in the region.

Nepal has made significant progress in reducing gender gaps in education, particularly at the primary and lower secondary levels. However, dropout rates among girls, especially in disadvantaged regions, indicate the need for ongoing, gender-focused interventions that tackle structural barriers to education (UNESCO, 2023; MoEST, 2023). Nepal's standing in the GGGI 2025 highlights these regional issues. The country is ranked 129<sup>th</sup> out of 148 nations in educational attainment, with a parity score of about 0.910. The table 3 shows Nepal's ranking in the GGGI 2025 Educational Attainment sub-index compared to other South Asian countries. Nepal trails behind several regional peers, underscoring persistent gender disparities in education and the importance of targeted policies to improve access, retention, and quality learning for women, especially in marginalized areas.

**Table 3**  
*Educational Attainment*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Global Rank/148</b>	<b>Score</b>
Bangladesh	115	0.960
Bhutan	118	0.954
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>0.910</b>
Sri Lanka	48	0.998
India	110	0.971
Maldives	1	1.000
Pakistan	137	0.851

Source: Global Gender Gap Index, 2025.

The Global Gender Gap Index 2025's Educational Attainment subindex highlights significant gender disparities in South Asia. Maldives leads worldwide with a perfect score of



1.000, reflecting full gender parity in education access and results. Sri Lanka also performs remarkably, ranking 48th with a score of 0.998, indicating very little gender gap in literacy and enrollment at all educational levels.

Nepal ranks 129<sup>th</sup> position out of 148 countries with a score of 0.910, behind regional peers such as India (110<sup>th</sup> position; 0.971), Bangladesh (115<sup>th</sup> position; 0.960), and Bhutan (118<sup>th</sup> rank; 0.954). The lower score highlights ongoing gender gaps in education, especially in literacy and transitions to secondary and higher education, despite some progress in primary enrollment. Pakistan, at 137<sup>th</sup> position with 0.851, sits at the regional low end, indicating considerable gender disparities in educational access and success. This analysis shows that although some South Asian countries have nearly equal progress, others, such as Nepal, still encounter significant obstacles. These results emphasize the urgent necessity for policies that not only improve girls' access to education but also tackle structural barriers to retention, completion, and equitable learning, especially in rural and marginalized areas.

### ***Health and Survival***

Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2022 (NDHS) provides important gender-specific data on women's health, education, and household decision-making. In health, 58% of women had four or more antenatal visits during their last pregnancy, and 80% of births were attended by skilled health personnel, showing progress from previous years. However, 22% of women aged 15–49 reported experiencing physical violence at least once since age 15, and 7% reported sexual violence (MoHP, 2022). These figures highlight the ongoing need to focus on improving women's health, safety, and economic empowerment. Nepal has achieved notable improvements in health and demographic outcomes, showing steady progress in gender-related development indicators (NSO, 2023). By 2025, life expectancy rose to 72.19 years from 66.6 years in 2011, with women living considerably longer than men, 73.8 years versus 68.2 years (NSO, 2021). Per capita health expenditure increased sharply to \$88.27 in 2022, a 32.65% rise from 2021, indicating greater investment in public health. Nevertheless, maternal health continues to be a concern. Although the maternal mortality rate (MMR) decreased from 173.0 per 100,000 live births in 2021 to 139.0 in 2022, it slightly increased again to 142.0 in 2023, highlighting the need for ongoing efforts. According to Nepal's 2021 National Census, about 2.2% of the population was reported to have some form of disability. When broken down by sex, 2.5% of males and 2.0% of females were identified as persons with disabilities, showing a slightly higher prevalence among males (National Statistics Office, 2023). Nepal's ranking in the GGGI 2025 reflects these regional issues. The country is ranked 91st position out of 148 countries in health and survival, with a parity score of around 0.966. The table below compares Nepal's position in the health and survival subindex of the GGGI 2025 with other South Asian countries.



**Table 4**

*Health and survival*

Country	Global Rank/148	Score
Bangladesh	123	0.960
Bhutan	126	0.959
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>0.966</b>
Sri Lanka	32	0.976
India	143	0.954
Maldives	127	0.959
Pakistan	131	0.959

Source: Global Gender Gap Index, 2025.

Table 4 highlights that the Health and Survival subindex of the Global Gender Gap Index 2025 measures gender parity in life expectancy and sex ratio at birth. The data reveals different levels of health outcome equality across South Asia. Sri Lanka leads the region, ranking 32nd worldwide with a high score of 0.976, reflecting near gender parity in health. Nepal follows, placing 91<sup>st</sup> position with a score of 0.966, outperforming most neighboring countries and indicating more balanced health outcomes between men and women. India ranks 143<sup>rd</sup> globally with a score of 0.954, revealing ongoing gender disparities, especially in sex ratio at birth and healthcare access. Countries like Bangladesh (rank 123; score 0.960), Bhutan (126; 0.959), Maldives (127; 0.959), and Pakistan (131; 0.959) are close in ranking, indicating moderate gender gaps in health and survival. Nepal's better performance in this area suggests improvements in female life expectancy and less gender bias in health services. Nonetheless, the regional trend shows persistent challenges in reaching full gender equality in health, especially in maternal care, child nutrition, and addressing gender-based discrimination in healthcare access.

***Political Empowerment***

In Nepal, the 2015 Constitution explicitly requires women to hold at least one-third of seats in the federal parliament, as outlined in Article 84(8) (Government of Nepal, 2015). During the 2022 federal elections, women won 92 of the 275 seats, roughly 33.5%, meeting the constitutional quota (IPU, 2023). At the local government level, laws such as the Local Level Election Act mandate that each ward elect two women, including at least one Dalit woman. Consequently, women made up 41.2% of all elected local officials in 2022, a slight increase from 40.8% in 2017, indicating notable progress in subnational political representation (Prasain & Dhakal, 2024).

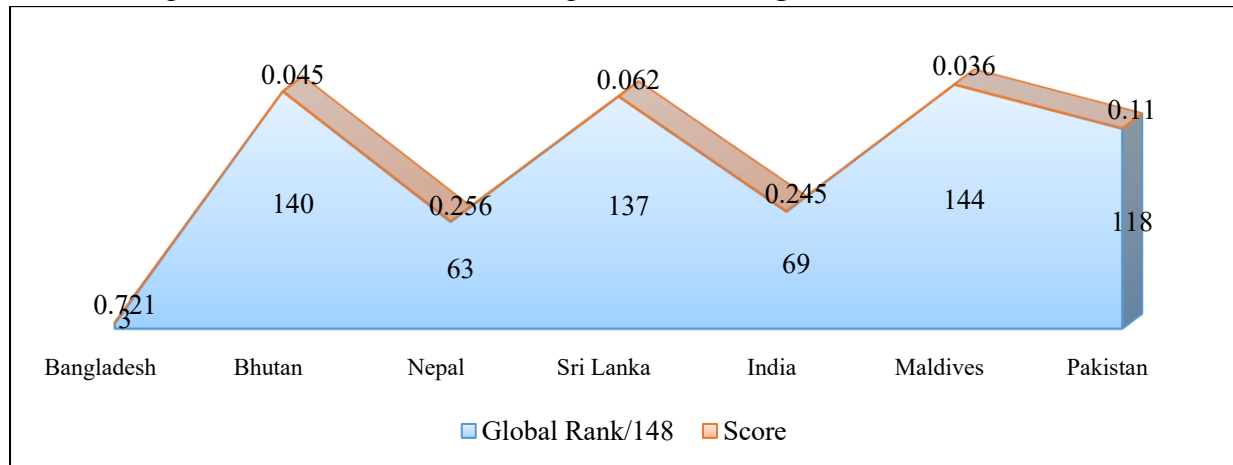
Major obstacles include deeply rooted socio-cultural norms, restricted access to financial and political resources, and gatekeeping by political parties. Women often face violence and harassment during elections, which discourages their active political participation. To address this, it is essential to strengthen gender-sensitive reforms, improve capacity building, and foster safer political environments. These steps are crucial for enabling women's meaningful participation and leadership (UN Women, 2024). While Nepal's constitution and

progress in women’s parliamentary and local government representation (Prasain & Dhakal, 2024) indicate advancements, the country’s overall political empowerment score reveals a more complex reality.

According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2025 political empowerment subindex, Nepal is ranked 63rd out of 148 countries with a score of 0.256 (World Economic Forum, 2025). It outperforms some regional neighbors like Bhutan (rank 140, score 0.045) and Sri Lanka (rank 137, score 0.062), but trails behind Bangladesh, which is 3rd with a score of 0.721. India is ranked 69th with a score of 0.245, slightly below Nepal, while Pakistan and Maldives have significantly lower rankings and scores. These numbers show that although Nepal has made progress in women’s numerical political representation, there is still much work needed to improve broader political empowerment, such as women’s access to high-level government and ministerial positions. The following chart displays the global rankings and political empowerment scores of Nepal and other South Asian countries.

**Figure 2**

*Political Empowerment in South Asia: Comparative Rankings and Scores*



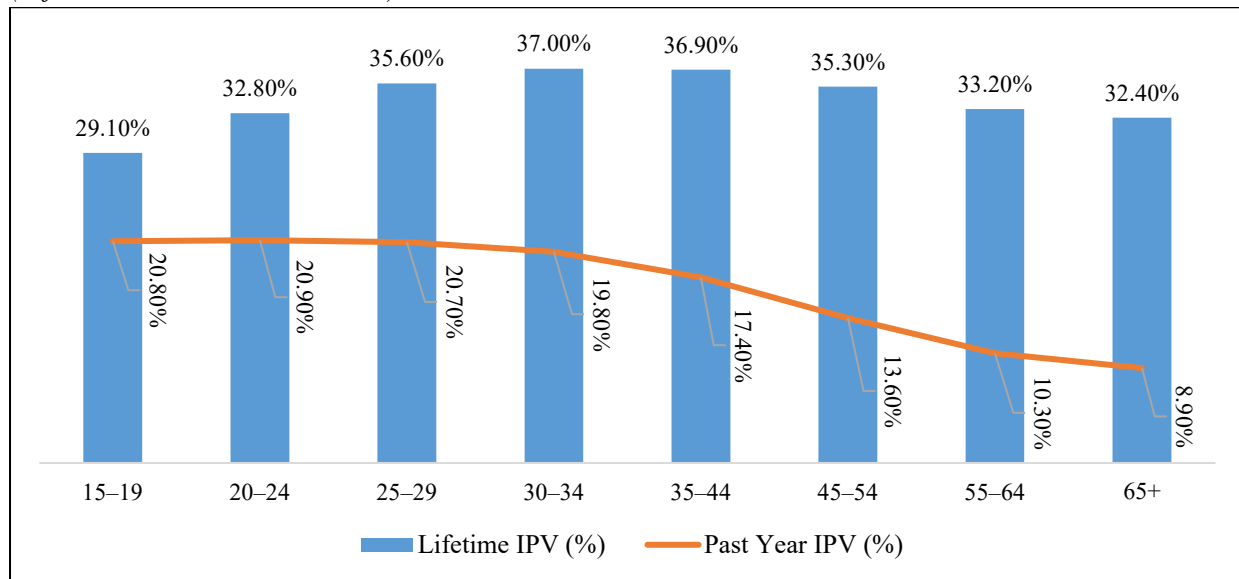
Source: Global Gender Gap Index, 2025.

***Gender-Based Violence in Nepal***

Gender-based violence (GBV) continues to be a major global issue, with almost one-third of women experiencing physical or sexual abuse at some point, mainly by intimate partners (UN Women, 2024). In South Asia, intimate partner violence (IPV) rates are similarly elevated, particularly among young women aged 15–24, with roughly 20% reporting recent incidents (World Bank, 2024).

**Figure 3**

*Proportion of Women Who have Experienced Intimate Partner Violence by Age Group (Lifetime and Past 12 Months) in South Asia*



Source: *World Bank. (2024). Gender data portal.*

The Department of Women and Children’s 2023 Annual Report highlights key gender-related issues in Nepal. It states that more than 36% of women have experienced some form of gender-based violence (GBV) during their lives, with domestic violence being the most common (DoWC, 2023). The report also mentions the operation of 84 One-Stop Crisis Management Centers (OCMCs) nationwide, offering legal, medical, and psychosocial support to survivors. Furthermore, it notes that 2.3 million women received social security benefits, including allowances for single women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Although access to services has improved, challenges remain in effectively implementing gender-responsive budgeting and enhancing local mechanisms to prevent GBV (DoWC, 2023).

In Nepal, official police data from FY 2080/81 highlights a concerning trend. Domestic violence is the most common issue, with over 16,000 cases reported, along with significant numbers of rape (2,507 cases), attempted rape, and child sexual abuse. These numbers show how deeply rooted gender-based violence (GBV) is in Nepal, driven by harmful social practices like polygamy, child marriage, and cultural discrimination. Although Nepal’s statistics are similar to regional and global trends, underreporting and gaps in legal protections suggest that the true extent of the problem may be even greater. Combating GBV in Nepal requires stronger laws, improved enforcement, and community efforts to challenge social norms that support violence against women. The data below offers a more detailed picture of this situation.



**Table 5**

*Types and Number of Gender-Based Violence Cases Reported in Nepal, FY 2080/81*

S. N.	Violence Type	Total Cases
1	Rape	2,507
2	Attempt to Rape	460
3	Child Sexual Abuse	363
4	Unnatural Intercourse	19
5	Abduction and Rape	54
6	Acid Attack	1
7	Child Marriage	52
8	Polygamy	653
9	Caste-based Discrimination & Untouchability	29
10	Illegal Abortion	31
11	Human Trafficking	166
12	Domestic Violence (DV)	16,416
13	Indecent Behavior (Public Sexual Abuse)	19
14	Trafficking and Rape	19
15	Murder after Rape	5
16	Witchcraft Allegation	23
17	Dowry-related Marriage Offense	10
18	Murder after Domestic Violence	81
19	Abuse against Senior Citizens	46

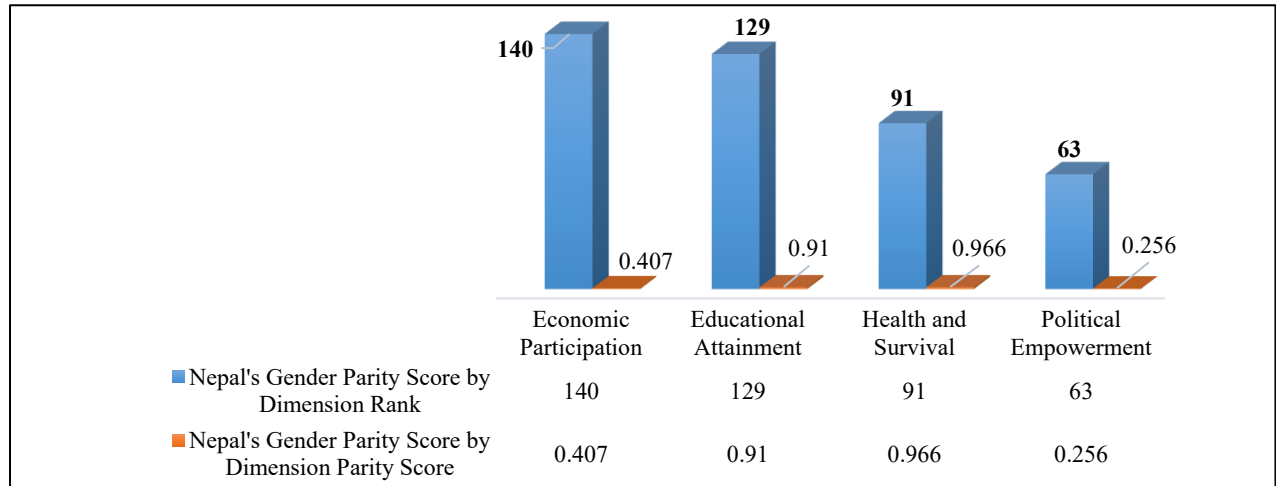
Source: *FY 2080/81 Annual Info graphics* by Nepal Police.

## Discussion

The data from the Global Gender Gap Index 2025 and Nepal's Economic Survey FY 2023/24 show a mixed picture of progress and ongoing gender inequalities. Nepal has made some gains, especially in political empowerment, where it ranks 63<sup>rd</sup> position with a parity score of 0.256, relatively strong compared to other South Asian nations. However, the Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex reveals serious issues, with Nepal ranking 140<sup>th</sup> position out of 148 countries and scoring only 0.460. Despite policies and targeted initiatives like the Prime Minister Employment Program which reports that 42.3% of its beneficiaries are women, female labor force participation remains very low at 29.2%. This gap between policy results and actual outcomes indicates the disconnect between strategic planning and structural change. The Figure 4 illustrates Nepal's Gender Parity Score by Dimension based on the GGI 2025.

**Figure 4**

*Nepal's Gender Parity Score by Dimension*



Source: Global Gender Gap Index, 2025.

Educational achievement and health outcomes in Nepal show moderate results. Nepal ranks 129<sup>th</sup> position in educational attainment with a parity score of 0.910 and 91<sup>st</sup> rank in health and survival, scoring 0.966. While these figures are close to global averages of 95.1% in education and 96.2% in health, deeper analysis uncovers ongoing challenges. For example, although more girls are enrolled in school, their transition into the workforce is still limited due to gender norms and lack of resources. In health, high maternal mortality in rural areas and restricted reproductive autonomy highlight ongoing issues in service delivery, which still struggles to provide equitable access for all women, especially marginalized groups.

Gender-based violence continues to be a significant obstacle to women's empowerment in Nepal. The Nepal Police's FY 2080/81 report recorded over 16,000 domestic violence cases, along with 2,507 rapes, 460 rape attempts, and 363 child sexual abuse incidents. This violence reflects not only individual suffering but also underlying structural issues. According to the World Bank (2024), nearly one-third of girls aged 15–19 have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV), with the highest recent IPV rates among women aged 20–24. These statistics highlight how widespread violence restricts women's freedom, participation, and well-being, further hindering their access to education, employment, and political involvement in a safe and equal manner.

Nepal has established a strong policy framework aimed at promoting gender equality, including gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), inclusion policies within the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) framework, and quota systems in politics and civil service. These measures have increased awareness and visibility of gender issues. Yet, the implementation of these policies is uneven. While 35.2% of Nepal's development budget, equivalent to NPR 148 billion, is labeled as gender-responsive, actual results are limited. For example, women represent only 10% of registered businesses in the cottage and small industry sector and 27.2% of civil service staff, mainly in sectors like health and education. The underrepresentation in



economic leadership suggests that budget allocations alone are insufficient to address deep-seated social and structural barriers.

Social norms are a persistent obstacle to achieving gender parity in Nepal. Deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs about caregiving, household chores, and leadership roles restrict women's participation outside the home. Structural issues, such as the gender pay gap, inadequate childcare facilities, and limited access to credit, further hinder women's economic advancement. Though laws are in place to combat violence, child marriage, and discrimination, enforcement remains weak, with many cases unreported due to stigma, fear, and distrust in the justice system. Gaps in the law and poor enforcement continue to hinder progress.

When Nepal's performance is viewed within the broader South Asian context, valuable lessons and comparisons become evident. Although Nepal ranks third regionally in overall gender parity (125<sup>th</sup> position worldwide), countries like Bangladesh and Bhutan show more effective results in specific areas. For example, Bangladesh ranks 3<sup>rd</sup> globally in political empowerment with a notable score of 0.721, emphasizing the potential of sustained investments in women's leadership and electoral participation. Sri Lanka excels in educational attainment (rank 48, score 0.998) and health (rank 32, score 0.976), reflecting the success of long-term investments in public services. Bhutan has made significant progress in economic participation with a score of 0.693, highlighting the impact of inclusive labor policies and private sector engagement. Compared to global averages, 68.8% of the gender gap closed overall, 61.0% in economic participation, and 95.1% in education, Nepal's performance remains below expectations, especially in economic areas. Looking ahead, Nepal must strengthen its efforts to close the gender gap by changing social norms, strengthening legal protections, and effectively implementing gender-responsive policies. Achieving gender equality requires more than just programmatic actions; it needs cultural change, institutional reforms, and a focus on measurable results. Expanding economic opportunities for women through targeted financing, skills development, and entrepreneurship programs; improving legal enforcement against gender-based violence; and creating supportive environments through childcare support and workplace safety are all vital. Only through a comprehensive and ongoing effort can Nepal move beyond small improvements toward real gender equality and social justice.

The economic participation of Nepal and the gap is driven by structural barriers, including limited access to education and skills training for women, which are deeply rooted in patriarchal norms that prioritize male employment, as feminist economic theories suggest. Rural-urban divides and inadequate infrastructure further widen these disparities by restricting the access of women to markets and job opportunities. Similarly, the low ranking in political empowerment in Nepal reflects entrenched socio-cultural norms and institutional weaknesses, despite constitutional commitments to gender equality. Political opportunity structure theories highlight how elite capture of political processes and insufficient grassroots representation hinder women's influence. Contextual factors, such as the lingering effects of past conflict and the slow recovery from the 2015 earthquake and COVID-19 pandemic have strained resources,





diverting attention from gender equity initiatives. Integrating these insights would deepen the understanding of these disparities and inform more effective, targeted policy interventions.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Nepal's progress toward gender equality includes notable achievements and ongoing obstacles. The country has seen moderate success in political representation and health, ranking relatively higher in these areas compared to other South Asian nations. However, its economic participation remains critically low, with a global position of 140 out of 148 and a parity score of only 0.460. Nepal ranks below countries like Sri Lanka (128) and Bhutan (76), and just above Pakistan (147). Despite programs such as the Prime Minister Employment Program and gender-responsive budgets, structural barriers including discriminatory social norms, poor legal enforcement, and limited economic opportunities still hinder women's involvement in work and entrepreneurship. The high rate of gender-based violence, with over 16,000 cases of domestic violence reported in one year, highlights ongoing safety and dignity concerns. Conversely, countries like Bangladesh show that continued investment in women's leadership and inclusive policies can lead to meaningful progress, especially in political empowerment. For Nepal to narrow the gender gap effectively, it must strengthen policy implementation, adopt regional best practices, and address the root causes of inequality through comprehensive legal, economic, and social reforms. Only through such a holistic, sustained approach can Nepal guarantee equal opportunities and rights for all citizens.

This study further explores that while Nepal has made notable progress in advancing gender equality across education, health, and political participation, persistent disparities remain in economic empowerment, decision-making, and access to resources. The findings highlight the necessity for policies that move beyond symbolic commitments and address structural barriers that perpetuate gender inequality. To enhance gender equality effectively, the future strategies should incorporate targeted interventions informed by the best regional practices. It is required to ensure inclusiveness and sustainability. Strengthening institutional accountability, investing in gender-responsive programs, and fostering multi-sectoral collaboration are critical steps toward translating commitments into tangible outcomes. A comprehensive and actionable policy framework is required to bridge existing gaps and accelerate Nepal's trajectory toward substantive gender equality.



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