

Nepal

Girl Child Centric Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

Submitted by:
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Introduction

Nepal is home to over 30 million people living in diversity. Nepal is expected to graduate to a middle-income country in 2026. In Nepal, the literacy rate stands at 71.2%ⁱ with 25% facing multidimensional poverty and 17.7% below the poverty rate.ⁱⁱ The Constitution of Nepal, 2015, has guaranteed the fundamental rights for women and children, setting the ground for a more progressive stance on human rights.

Nepal has made notable progress in advancing the rights of girls through a combination of legislative reforms, social policies, and development initiatives. The country has enacted laws to promote gender equality, invested in education, and partnered with international and local organizations to uplift girls' status in society. According to the 2021 National Population and Housing Census, girls under the age of 18 constitute approximately 20.12% of Nepal's total population and make up around 40% of the total female population. This significant demographic representation illustrates the value of tailoring development efforts to meet the specific needs of girls. In the area of education, the net enrollment rate for girls at the primary level has surpassed 94%, a strong indicator of progress in ensuring access to foundational learning opportunities. The trend has shown growing awareness, policy interventions, and targeted support programs, which have been effective but still not enough for Nepal to achieve inclusive and sustainable development leveraging gender equality and equity. This UPR report focuses on the situation of the rights of girl-child in Nepal and points out the actions to be taken by the government of Nepal.

Methodology

A systematic desk review and analysis of secondary sources to assess the status of girls' rights in Nepal was conducted. The review included existing literature, government reports, policy documents, and academic studies published by the Government of Nepal, civil society organizations, UN agencies, and human rights institutions. Key national documents, including relevant laws, policies, strategies, and programs, were thoroughly examined. Additionally, inputs were gathered from a joint consultation led by the Children Zone of Peace (CZOP), a consortium of organizations working in child rights and protection, of which Jcyn is a member, and from a consultation organized by Jcyn with the Nawalpur Adolescent Girls Network and participants of Jcyn's Girls Empowerment Program which is supported by KANALLAN and is implemented in Madhyabindu Municipality of Gandaki province. Notably, 27 adolescent girls participated in the consultation led by Jcyn, held on 24th May 2025 in Madhyabindu Municipality. These consultations provided valuable perspectives from adolescent girls and stakeholders.

Legal and Constitutional Arrangements

The constitution of Nepal, 2015, has guaranteed the fundamental rights in its provisions. Article 38 recognizes women's rights as fundamental rights and prohibits discrimination based on gender in all areas. It has also recognized the right to equal lineage, reproductive health services and facilities, as well as compensation for victims of crimes. Moreover, it also has ensured the proportional representation of women in state bodies, which mandates 33% representation in all associations and organized bodies. Likewise, Article 39 guarantees every child the right to identity, education, health, and protection from exploitation.

Nepal has enacted various domestic laws for the protection and promotion of the rights of girls, covering various areas, such as health, education, disability rights, and gender equality. Some of the notable laws and policies include the Act Relating to Children, 2018; the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 2000; the Act to Amend Some Nepal Acts to Maintain Gender Equality (2006); the National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2016-2030); and the Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Rights Act, 2018, among others.

Nepal has made significant progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, though setbacks such as COVID-19 have slowed the momentum. Specifically for SDG 5—Gender Equality, 88.9% of legal frameworks are set in place. Women's political participation has reached 33.1%, meeting the constitutional mandates. Moreover, 61.9% of women of reproductive age have their needs of family planning met through modern methods. However, challenges like child marriage, girls' school dropout, poverty, and harmful cultural norms remain significant.

Nepal is signatory to seven human rights instruments out of nine introduced by the United Nations. This includes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), among others, which have created an obligation for the government to make relevant and significant legislative, administrative, and policy measures to ensure the rights of girls.

Review of Previous UPR cycles:

Nepal received 233 recommendations during the third UPR cycle, among which Nepal accepted 196 and noted 37 recommendations.ⁱⁱⁱ

1. Education:

Nepal has made good progress in girl's education, with the net enrollment rate reaching 94.3% at the primary level and near gender parity of 0.99 in school enrollment. However, the rate dropped to 62.9% in secondary level, highlighting high dropout rates among adolescent girls due to poverty, early marriage, menstrual taboos, and other socio-cultural barriers, especially in rural areas. The female literacy rate is 70.1%, showing the generational improvement. In previous UPR recommendations, Nepal was recommended to ensure free and quality education for all, including Dalits, indigenous peoples and children with disabilities; promotion of gender parity at all levels, and implement the Free and Compulsory Education Act (2018), while ensuring inclusive curricula free from discriminatory content.

Government Actions

- Strengthened its efforts in increasing girl's enrollment, provision of gender-inclusive curriculum through special provisions such as scholarships, grants and resource centers.
- Separated investments for school infrastructures, including constructing safe and child-friendly schools with gender-separated sanitation facilities.
- Introduced the use of information technology in order to enhance the learning of the students.
- Implemented the Free and Compulsory Education Act, including penalties for non-compliance.

Recommendations

- Strengthen the technical and vocational education and training to address skills gaps in the labor market, aligning with the market needs and international certification of Nepalese workers.
- Promote digital skills in primary and secondary education, alongside integration of IT infrastructure in rural areas, collaborating with public and private partners.
- Promote public-private partnerships in education, facilitating international academic collaborations.
- Promote and strengthen of research institutes within the universities and improving gender-sensitive curriculum promoting female leadership in educational institutions
- Invest in a girls-friendly school infrastructure, separate and safe toilets for girls, improved WASH facilities, and menstrual hygiene management, and implement effective complaint-handling mechanisms.

2. Health, Nutrition, and Access to Services

According to the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2022, only 46% of girls aged 15–19 have comprehensive knowledge of SRHR, and over 30% suffer from anemia. The adolescent birth rate remains high at 51 per 1,000, with 14% having been pregnant, largely due to child marriage. While 94% of women receive antenatal care and 80% of births are attended by skilled providers, gaps persist in privacy (12%) and emergency care readiness (2.5%). Access to menstrual hygiene products and awareness is especially low in Karnali and Sudurpaschim. Nepal was previously recommended to ensure universal access to adolescent-friendly SRHR services, integrate comprehensive sexuality education in schools, and decriminalize abortion to ensure safe procedures.

Government actions

- Adolescent sexual and reproductive health has been integrated into the national health strategy, in order to provide adolescent friendly health services in selected health facilities across the country.
- A menstrual hygiene management policy has been introduced by the government, while incorporating menstrual health topics into the school curriculum.
- School health and nutrition programs have been introduced, which include iron supplementation for adolescent girls and education on hygiene and nutrition.
- Legal access to safe abortion up to 12 weeks of gestation under specified grounds was maintained.
- Comprehensive Sexuality Education has been included in school curricula targeting the adolescents.

Recommendations

- Increase investments in nutrition programs targeting adolescent girls to control malnutrition.
- Expand and promote comprehensive sexuality education to empower girls with information about their bodies and reproductive rights.
- Improve access to menstrual health education and hygiene facilities.
- Ensure equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services, along with proper information and support for adolescent girls.

3. Child Protection and Marriage

Child marriage and gender-based violence (GBV) remain serious challenges in Nepal, especially among marginalized communities. Although child marriage rates among girls aged 15–19 dropped from 43% in 1996 to 21%, enforcement of the legal marriage age of 20 is weak, particularly in rural areas. A recent government proposal to lower the age to 18 faced strong backlash, threatening gains in adolescent girls' protection. GBV is widely underreported, with only one in four girls disclosing incidents, and support services like shelters, psychosocial care, and legal aid remain limited and inaccessible. Child protection concerns persist amid trafficking, harmful traditional practices, and exploitation, especially linked to poverty and migration. The 2017/18 Labour Force Survey revealed nearly 1.1 million children in child labour, including 0.2 million in its worst forms. While Nepal has made legal and institutional progress, enforcement, rehabilitation, and victim-centered support remain weak.

In its third UPR cycle, Nepal received key recommendations to end child marriage by 2030 and strengthen efforts against child labour, exploitation, torture, and slavery.

Government Actions

- The Child Marriage Prevention Act (2017) prohibits child marriage, sets the minimum marriage age at 20, and penalizes offenders.
- Developed the National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2016-2025), which aims to reduce child marriage by 30% by 2030.
- Adopted a 10-year National Master Plan (2018–2028) to eliminate child labour.
- The Constitution prohibits subjecting women and girls to physical, mental, sexual, psychological or other forms of violence or exploitation on the grounds of religion, social, cultural, tradition, or practice.
- The Penal Code prohibits marriage before attaining the age of twenty years, and criminalizes banishing a woman to shed during menstruation or delivery or subjecting her to similar other forms of discrimination or harmful treatment (*Chaupadi* practice).

- Introduced child-friendly detention standards, established dedicated juvenile benches with child protection officers, and opened a Juvenile Court in the Federal Capital.
- Launched various campaigns in an attempt to reduce the *Chaupadi* system, such as the *Chhaupadi* free campaign, promotion of dignified menstruation.
- The National Women Commission runs a 24-hour helpline, 1145, which is a GBV helpline that provides integrated services from one platform that includes shelter, children-related services, and legal aid.^{iv}
- Child Helpline 1098^v and 104 are being operated by CSOs in eighteen districts in the guidance of the MoWCSC and the coordination and cooperation of Child Rights Council to rescue children at risk and provide relief, protection, psychosocial counseling, legal services, health treatment, and family reunions for rescued children.
- One Stop Crisis Management Centers (OCMCs)^{vi} were expanded in order to provide integrated services including legal aid, psychological support and shelter.
- Coordination with child protection committees and female community health volunteers has been promoted to delay marriage age and empower girls and parents.

Recommendations

- Provide legal support and protection for survivors of child marriage and gender-based violence to ensure their access to justice without fear of retaliation.
- Establish safe shelters for the survivors of gender-based violence, where they can seek protection and rebuild their lives.
- Extend more collaboration with community organizations, youth-led organizations, etc. to provide support, create awareness, and offer services for the prevention of child marriage and GBV.
- Promote art, storytelling, street drama and media to counter harmful norms in respectful and culturally relevant ways.
- Involve religious leaders, priests and community elders in campaigns to reinterpret religious teachings promoting girls' education and gender equality through community sensitization programs.
- Implement a child labour monitoring system in informal sectors, with regular inspections and referrals to support services.
- Launch community-based education programs focusing on addressing misconceptions around menstruation, child marriage, and gender roles.

4. Girls' Leadership and Participation

Girls in Nepal are increasingly participating in leadership and decision-making through youth-led movements, school clubs, child clubs, girls clubs, and civil society platforms, and raising voices in areas like child marriage, gender-based violence, climate justice, and education reflects progress towards gender-inclusive governance.

The 2015 Constitution mandates 33% women's representation in Parliament and local governments, creating space for female political participation. The Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) Framework has further enabled girls' participation in local planning meetings, allowing them to contribute to decisions on education, health, and child protection. Structural barriers such as gender norms, lack of mentorship, and limited access to resources still restrict girls' participation in higher-level leadership.

Regarding leadership and inclusion, Nepal received recommendations regarding eliminating caste- and gender-based discrimination via public awareness and inclusive education, along with protection of the rights of vulnerable groups and ensuring their meaningful participation in leadership and decision-making roles.

Government Actions

- Supported and acknowledged child, youth, and girls clubs to foster leadership and advocacy skills.
- Partnered with NGOs and youth networks to promote civic engagement, leadership training and awareness among adolescent girls.
- Has been promoting the concept of Child-Friendly Local Governance (CFLG) that empowers child clubs to monitor child-focused services and advocate for appropriate budget allocation for children.
- Engages the child clubs, networks and adolescent groups during the preparation of development plans focused on education, child protection and health.

Recommendations

- Establish and expand leadership development programs coupled with decision-making and technical skills.
- Provide equal access to education at all levels for girls and offer vocational training programs to promote entrepreneurship and career development.
- Enforce and strengthen laws against gender-based discrimination, ensuring girls have equal access to leadership roles in all sectors.
- Conduct community-based programs to promote girls' education, leadership and participation.
- Allocate dedicated local government budgets under the Child Friendly Local Governance Framework to fund leadership clubs and initiatives targeting adolescent girls.
- Promote government-led fellowship programs to promote leadership among girls.

5. Climate Change

Climate change is a critical issue in Nepal, causing rising temperatures, glacier melting, floods, landslides, and other disasters. These impacts disproportionately affect girls, who face unique risks such as increased school dropout rates due to climate-induced displacement, as well as heightened health vulnerabilities during crises. In the last UPR cycle, Nepal received recommendations to ensure the meaningful participation of women, children, persons with disabilities, and indigenous communities in climate change and disaster risk frameworks and to apply inclusive approaches in disaster mitigation strategies.

Government Actions

- Incorporated GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) components into the National Climate Change Policy.^{vii}
- Local Disaster and Climate Resilience Plans now mandate community participation, particularly from marginalized groups.

Recommendations

- Strengthen mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation of adolescent girls and marginalized groups in all levels of climate change policy, planning, and implementation.
- Develop targeted programs to address the climate-related barriers girls face, such as school dropout and health risks, through gender-responsive adaptation strategies.
- Expand capacity-building initiatives to equip local officials and communities with skills to implement inclusive, girl-centered climate resilience actions.
- Improve data collection and monitoring on the gendered impacts of climate change to inform evidence-based policymaking focused on girls' needs.

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