



GENDER EQUALITY UPDATE - 32

NEEDS AND CHALLENGES THAT WOMEN
AND EXCLUDED GROUPS CONTINUE
TO EXPERIENCE DURING THE CURRENT
WAVE OF COVID-19

JULY, 2021

INTRODUCTION

The Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Task Team Meeting on 8 June 2021 continued to focus on the immediate needs and challenges of excluded and vulnerable groups during the current wave of COVID-19 in Nepal. The meeting included representatives from organizations / networks of LGBTIQ+ communities, single women, returnee women migrant workers, home-based workers, women engaged in sex work, women with disabilities, indigenous women, Dalit women, Madhesi women, Muslim women, indigenous women and rural women, as well as the Humanitarian and Disaster Risk Reduction Network, among other organisations.

COVID-19 Highlights from 12-18 June 2021

 61,725
ACTIVE CASES

 Around 2,000 per day (a decline from previous weeks)
NEW CASES

 27.5%
CASE POSITIVITY

 More than 601,687¹ as of 10th June, 2021
TOTAL CASES IN NEPAL



Relief distribution of food and non-food items. Photo: UN Women/Uma Bista

Source: Nepal: COVID-19 Pandemic Office of UN Resident Coordinator Situation Report No. 41 as of 18th June 2021

¹ CoVid19-Dashboard (mohp.gov.np) <https://un.org.np/resource/covid-19-sitrep-41>

COVID-19 Crisis Management Ordinance 2021

The COVID-19 Crisis Management Ordinance 2021 was promulgated in response to the unprecedented challenges brought on by the pandemic. Through this ordinance a COVID-19 Directive Committee chaired by the Prime Minister and a Provincial Directive Committee chaired by the Chief Minister has been created. It supports institutional arrangements, such as the COVID-19 Crisis Management Centre, and designated Chief District Officers as the Response Officers in each of Nepal's 77 districts. It also established the COVID-19 Unified Center Hospital in Kathmandu, that will offer integrated treatment and coordinate between all healthcare institutions to monitor oxygen support and hospital beds. The ordinance also introduced health emergency provisions in a public health crisis, such as the lockdown. In addition to this, it established a COVID-19 response fund and a fast-track modality for services and procurement. It also offers exemptions on mandatory dates in court hearings and granted special privileges during lockdown periods (for example on tax payment deadlines and revenue payments), allowing support for marginalized women. Furthermore, it ensures continuity in public information, preventing rumours and misleading information. A limitation of the ordinance, as shared by the Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), is that it does not include any provision for representation of women and excluded groups in the COVID-19 Directive Committee, the Provincial Directive Committee and the COVID-19 Crisis Management Centre.

Recommendations from GiHA Members to address limitations in the ordinance:

 Ensure the regular availability of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights services without interrupting provisions for COVID-19 health services.

 Make services relating to child protection, gender-based violence (GBV), sexual violence and domestic violence as “essential services” during the COVID-19 enforced lockdown and provide security, justice and other public services to survivors.

 Ensure that different communities are protected from identity-based discrimination while accessing vaccines, health services and relief packages.

 Enforce and recognize the e-court system, which enables virtual pleading, registration, and statements; this will ensure access to justice during the pandemic.

 Recognize the e-commerce system that allowed people to safely procure goods online.

Nepal Citizenship Act, 2006 (First Amendment) Ordinance 2021

The Nepal Citizenship (First Amendment) Ordinance 2021 which was added to Nepal Citizenship Act 2006 brings about two major changes. First, it grants citizenship by descent to offsprings whose parents obtained Nepali citizenship by birth prior to 20 September, 2015. The FWLD estimated that this will allow around 500,000 children to obtain Nepali citizenship. Second, this ordinance allows women who are domiciled in Nepal to pass their citizenship onto their offspring by descent, regardless of the whereabouts of the child's father.

The provisions in this ordinance to amend the Nepal Citizenship Act are in line with Articles 11(3) and 11(5) of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015.² Despite addressing two important issues, the FWLD noted how the ordinance remains discriminatory because it does not recognize the right of women to transfer their citizenship to their children unless they give information about the father, either by sharing that he is unidentified, a Nepali citizen or a foreign national. Till 8th June, 2021 six writs against the ordinance have been filed. The supreme court imposed an interim order to halt the citizenship ordinance on 10th June 2021.

Needs and challenges facing vulnerable groups



Access to Vaccination: Out of the total population, 8.2% (2,491,114) have received at least one dose and 2.4% (730,728) have received two doses.³ Many people are unable to access vaccinations, including women from excluded groups, rural women and people with disabilities. There is an urgent need to vaccinate Nepal's most vulnerable populations.



Access to Information: Information about the vaccination is not reaching certain excluded groups, resulting in misinformation around taking the vaccine. There is a need for stronger efforts to disseminate inclusive and accessible COVID-19 and health-related information and services, including information about the vaccination and where to access it.

² Article 11(3) of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 - A child of a citizen having obtained the citizenship of Nepal by virtue of birth prior to the commencement of this Constitution shall, upon attaining the age of majority, acquire the citizenship of Nepal by descent in case the child's father and mother both are citizens of Nepal. Article 11(5) of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 - A person who is born in Nepal to a woman who is a citizen of Nepal and has resided in Nepal and whose father is not traced shall be provided with the citizenship of Nepal by descent. Provided that in case his or her father is held to be a foreign citizen, the citizenship of such person shall be converted into naturalized citizenship as provided for in the federal law.

³ COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign, Daily Coverage Report, DoHS, MoHP, [Stateless in their own country - The Record \(recordnepal.com\)](https://www.recordnepal.com)



Cash and In-Kind Support: The pandemic has caused significant job losses, resulting in vulnerable groups not being able to afford basic needs, like food. Providing relief packages and economic support is key to helping families cope with the current wave of COVID-19. Relief packages must include essential items, such as nutritious food and kits that contain masks, medicine, a thermometer, and an oximeter with instructions on how to use them. Similarly, economic support is needed to help those who are struggling to pay their rent and other basic expenses.



Safety and Security from GBV and Domestic Violence: One of the most critical challenges during the lockdown has been the inability of victims/survivors to access timely, quality services.⁴ Women across Nepal are finding it increasingly difficult to go out during lockdown and access essential services. As cases of GBV and domestic violence increase during the lockdown, continuity of provisions for rescue services, psychosocial, legal counselling and safe homes should be made. These services should be accessible for all with local governments guaranteeing access to justice. Further, it is recommended that GBV services be considered “essential services” during COVID -19.



Inaccessible Health Services: Due to lockdown restrictions, health services that cater to marginalised groups are closed and supportive assistance for these groups are unavailable. Certain medical treatments not classified as essential, including sexual reproductive and maternal health services, antiretroviral therapy treatment and hormone replacement therapy are also currently unavailable. Sanitary pads used by women with disabilities, catheters used by people with spinal cord injuries, diapers, urine bags and regular medical services and contact for people with psychosocial disabilities are also not listed as “essential services.” As a result, many groups have not been able to access relief support and have experienced problems when accessing it. Many COVID-19 related services are also limited to urban areas and therefore inaccessible to rural or marginalized communities because of the distance and/or high cost of medications and testing.

⁴ Care Nepal, Save the Children, and Ministry of Women Children and Senior Citizens, 2020, Rapid Gender Analysis Report on COVID-19 Nepal, available at: [A Rapid Gender Analysis on COVID-19 Nepal 2020 | UN Women – Asia-Pacific](#)

Monitoring and Actions by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

The NHRC has visited many isolation centres, prisons and hospitals to monitor the impact of COVID-19. In prisons, they found that even basic medical or health needs are not being met. Some health professionals working with patients who tested positive for COVID-19 also disclosed that they were not given safe spaces to stay in within the hospitals, resulting in a fear of spreading the virus to family and community members. The NHRC has been distributing flyers to networks of excluded groups to ensure their access to information. They have also provided counselling services to 300 women in Central Jail in Kathmandu, with support from the United Nations Population Fund, as well as 1,000 masks from UN Women. The NHRC is also conducting monitoring of isolation centres run/managed by private organizations.

Key recommendations by NHRC:



Invest 20% of the governmental agencies budget towards providing essential health care items to vulnerable groups like women, children, senior citizens, persons with disability and LGBTIQ+ communities.



Ensure local governments switch to a fast-track model for reporting GBV to ensure access to justice and allow victims/survivors to register First Information Reports.



Monitor the media and conduct physical monitoring to gather information on vaccine sentiments.

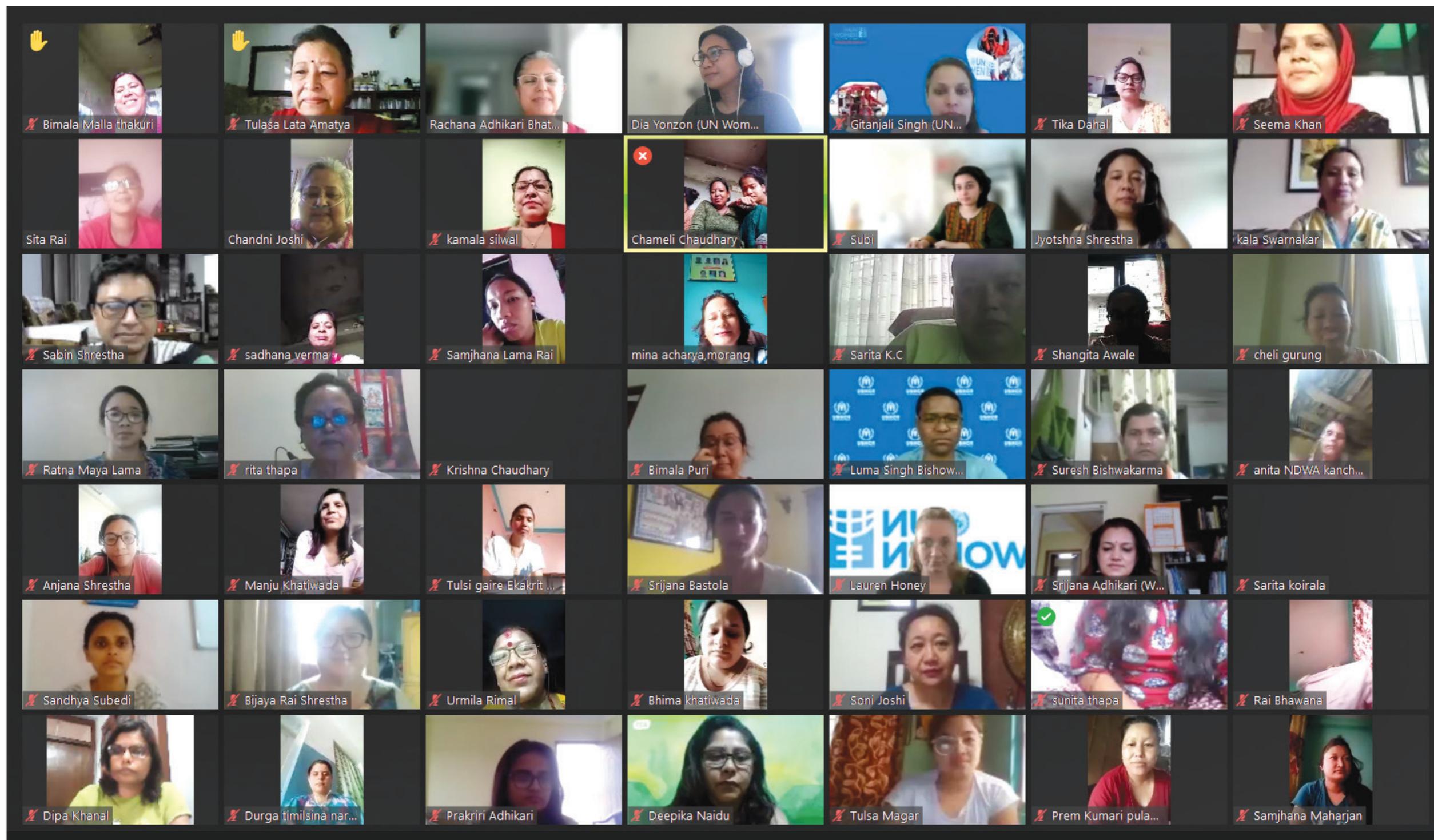


Ensure regular vaccination drives.



WHR distributes sanitizers, masks, sanitary napkins and personal protective equipment to women in Budanikantha Municipality with support from UN Women. Photo: Courtesy of WHR

Gender in Humanitarian Action Task Team Meeting, 8th June 2021



HELPLINE NUMBERS

COVID-19-Related Information from Ministry of Health and Population:

1133 (24 hours)
1115 (6 AM to 10 PM)

Gender-Based Violence and Psychosocial Counselling:

Nepal Police: 100 (Available 24 hours)
National Women's Commission: 1145 (Available 24 hours)

Helpline Dedicated to Support the LGBTIQ+ Community:

Blue Diamond Society 9841 313 377, 9849 027 019
Support Love 9821 987 952, 9847 498 849

Forum for Women, Law and Development Legal Counselling for Gender-Based Violence:

Province 1: Advocate Mina Giri 9842 045 843
Province 2: Advocate Om Kumari Sah 9841 747 032
Bagmati Province: Advocate Lalita Shrestha 9845 031 945
Gandaki Province: Advocate Kalpana Bhandari 9856 008 973
Lumbini Province: Advocate Sushma Gautam 9851 120 060
Karnali Province: Advocate Gita Koirala 9863 126 060
Sudurpashchim Province: Advocate Kaushila Yogi 9868 002 020

Cyber Violence Helpline Number (Available 24 hours)

Nepal Police Cyber Bureau 9851 286 770, 9851 286 770

Mental Health:

The Centre for Mental Health and Counselling-Nepal 1660 018 5080
Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Nepal 1660 010 2005
Koshish Nepal 1660 012 2322
Women's Rehabilitation Center 1660 017 8910
Tarangini Foundation 1660 012 0004
Teaching Hospital 9849 630 430

Suicide Helpline (Available 24 hours)

Teaching Hospital 9840 021 6000
Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation Nepal 1166



Relief distribution of food and non-food items by Pourakhi Nepal with support from UN Women. Photo: Courtesy of Pourakhi Nepal

RESOURCES:

[GESI Checklist on Disaster/Emergency Preparedness in the COVID-19 Context Gender Equality Update 23 on Monsoon Response](#)
[COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plans](#)

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