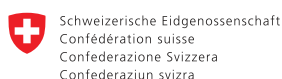
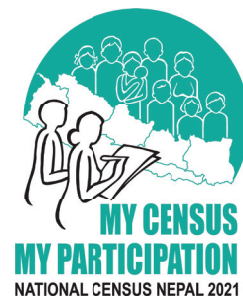


# THE 2021 NEPAL POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS SUPPORT PROJECT



Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC  
स्वीस सरकार विकास सहयोग एसडीसी



## PREFACE

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***Every individual deserves to be counted, and accounted for.***

Today, with the global population passing the eight billion mark, and major demographic shifts occurring everywhere, more attention is focused on demographics and its linkages with sustainable development. Accurate and timely data are more important than ever and the population and housing census is a foundational and comprehensive source. The census is critical to national and sub-national development planning and tracking progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Without population data, progress towards achieving these goals would be implemented in a vacuum. The data from the 2021 census of Nepal is especially important given that the country is transforming – the economic, demographic and social environment are changing fast – within the context of federalism, and as the country seeks to graduate from least developed country status by 2026.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), recognising the critical nature of the census, supports governments with census data generation, analysis, dissemination, and utilisation for development planning through providing technical expertise and supporting technological advancements to ensure that “everyone, everywhere, is counted, and accounted for, in the pursuit of sustainable development”.

To support the Government of Nepal with the 2021 Census, UNFPA Nepal is collaborating with likeminded partners – the British Embassy Kathmandu and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation – with a common goal of improving the socio-economic well-being of Nepal’s people in an inclusive and accountable federal state. Their partnership for support to the 2021 Census of Nepal is a crucial step in this direction. The partnership has benefited from the combined in-country capacity of all three

organisations including, crucially, knowledge of the local context, relationships with government and the development community and stakeholders as well as proven capacity for adaptability and flexibility for effective developmental outcomes in the complex context of Nepal.

***Recording the lives of 29.2 million people in Nepal was a fascinating exercise.***

This knowledge brief outlines the components and benefits of the collaboration, challenges, lessons learned and achievements of this exercise – from start to finish. It is our hope that documenting these practices will help us learn and shape our support to governments across the world in future censuses, surveys and other large-scale support programmes which are both technical and situated in complex political settings, such as Nepal: both from the perspective of data to inform policy making and the risks of misusing data. Given the detailed planning and unique execution of census related tasks spanning a five-year period in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, global economic instability and elections, this knowledge product is intended to serve as a resource for development partners intent on engaging in large-scale technical development projects with governments, such as a population and housing census.

UNFPA, the British Embassy Kathmandu and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation are committed to continue to support the Government of Nepal to fully utilise census data to leave no-one-behind in the pursuit of sustainable development, and will to continue to invest in statistical system strengthening for a prosperous, inclusive Nepal.

***Progress towards a sustainable and more prosperous Nepal requires all our capabilities.***





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## WHAT IS A POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS?

A population and housing census is the complete enumeration of every person and related housing units within a country every 10 years; it provides information on numbers of people, their spatial distribution, age and sex structure, living conditions and other key demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

These data are critical for:

- » good governance
- » policy formulation
- » development planning
- » crisis prevention, mitigation and response
- » social welfare programmes, and
- » business market analyses.

## UNFPA AND CENSUSES

At the request of governments, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supports countries to strengthen national capacities to ensure that censuses are of international standard, and that the results are effectively utilized for policies and programmes that promote sustainable development. UNFPA provides robust support to governments for national census planning, implementation, and use of the resulting data including to track population change and spatial and social inequalities in development including through the Sustainable Development Goals.

## CENSUS SUPPORT PROJECT

Whilst the Government of Nepal has conducted 11 censuses in the past, the support of UNFPA was requested to conduct the 12th Census (2021) in line with international standards. This support was a scaled up version from UNFPA's support in 2011, bringing in new census methodologies and technological advancements.

The support to the 2021 Census is significant as this is the first census undertaken in a federalised context and there is a huge demand for data by governments and other stakeholders at all levels. The British Embassy Kathmandu and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in Nepal both consider the census as a fundamental pillar of the statistical system in Nepal, as data is key for informed policy-making. The British Embassy Kathmandu and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation seized the opportunity to support the National Statistics Office of the Government of Nepal with the census, through the technical assistance of UNFPA as lead



agency for the Census Support Project. The British Embassy Kathmandu support from September 2019 to March 2023 covered planning, enumeration, analysis and the first part of the dissemination of the census, while assistance provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation has been interwoven with support from the British Embassy Kathmandu across enumeration, analysis and dissemination phases spanning from July 2021 to December 2023.

In order to ensure the support was of high quality UNFPA engaged an experienced Census Coordinator to lead the UNFPA Census Support Project team. The team also benefited from the expert guidance of a technical adviser at UNFPA Regional Office, expertise shared by the Technical Division of UNFPA HQ and other UNFPA census experts based in countries around the world. A Development Partners Census Working Group was established and utilised as a key forum for ensuring that stakeholders were engaged and understood the census processes, procedures and progress (including during COVID-19).

*"The census is a massive undertaking. It is a crucial tool for policymakers, researchers, and analysts to gather data on the population and its characteristics. The role of the National Statistics Office in conducting the census was essential in ensuring that the data collected was accurate and reliable. The methodology and rigorous data collection process ensured that the data collected reflected the actual situation on the ground."*

**Deenanath Lamsal**  
National Statistics Office

## KEY BENEFITS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

A key strength of the Census Support Project is the in-country presence of the British Embassy Kathmandu, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and UNFPA staff, who have statistical knowledge, understand the context and have well established relationships with the government and useful connections across the development community. UNFPA and the National Statistics Office were able to leverage the guidance and support offered by a range of expertise (through the British Embassy Kathmandu and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), advising on management of risks, relationships, foreseeing challenges, and ensuring that all activities met the broader needs of the development community in the pursuit of sustainable development, leaving-no-one-behind and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) principles in a federal Nepal. The partnership was critical to supporting the National Statistics Office to undertake the census in the often complex context of Nepal through intergovernmental and international agency backing and support for the operation especially at critical times, including through liaison with the government at diplomatic levels.

For example, weathering the challenges of COVID-19, fieldwork postponement, government budget cuts and governmental change, and the potentially contentious census inter-linkages with elections and the census process as a catalyst for social tensions.

The Census Support Project has benefited from knowledge sharing across the Development Partners Statistics Coordination Group, with its aim to strengthen the statistical system across governance, census, surveys, administrative data and data use including from GESI perspectives.

A key feature of the partnership involved the Census Support Project being part of the Evidence for Development (E4D) Programme of the British Embassy Kathmandu, which benefited from the presence in-country and active engagement of a UK Government Statistician, including the added value of their experience and expertise which enhanced the management of the Census Support Project.





## TIMELINE

Conducting a census involves a series of carefully orchestrated steps starting from pre-census planning through enumeration, data processing, analysis, dissemination and finally utilization of results.

**AUGUST  
2018**

Envisioning and initial discussions on the 2021 Census in Nepal with technical input from British Embassy Kathmandu.



- » Towards the end of 2018: Undertaking of a risk analysis to inform the development of the Census Project Document, as the representation of ethnic, caste, religious, and linguistic diversity was identified as a key challenge for an inclusive census in the context of Nepal.
- » Assessment of the operating environment in terms of ICT infrastructure (mobile network) conducted.
- » Development of the Census Project Document, including budget and timeline.
- » Development of a Project Brief for resource mobilization.
- » Guidance and orientation on updating of census cartography provided to the National Statistics Office.

**JUNE  
2019**

Census Project Document endorsed by the Government of Nepal/National Planning Commission.



**SEPT.  
2019**

Contribution Arrangement between FCD0 (then DfID) and UNFPA signed for support on the pre-census planning and preparatory phase of the 2021 Census.



- » IT equipment comprising 2,250 tablets, other hardware and software was procured in November 2020 through UNFPA Procurement Services Branch with UKAid funding. The tablets were used for enumeration in the Kathmandu Valley and will be used by the National Statistics Office for future data collection.
- » Establishment of a bespoke census website and an online recruitment system for fieldworkers.

**JUNE  
2020**

The National Statistics Office undertakes a census pilot exercise.



**SEPT.  
2020**

Recruitment of an experienced Census Coordinator by UNFPA to lead the Census Support Project and coordination between the National Statistics Office and the Development Community.



- » Widespread consultations organised by the Census Support Project and the National Statistics Office to ensure the census questions were in line with international standards and adhered to GESI principles.
- » Detailed feedback provided to the National Statistics Office on census questionnaires, manuals and training materials to ensure they meet GESI principles and international standards.
- » Assessment of the functionality of the digital questionnaire to be used to enumerate in the Kathmandu Valley using tablets.

**MAY  
2021**

Census fieldwork postponed due to COVID-19.



- » Procurement of personal protection equipment and implementation of other health safety measures for fieldworkers.

*"Young Innovations is proud to have developed the Data Visualisation Portal for the 2021 Census, providing accessible population and housing data for evidence-based planning. Our achievements extend to successfully recruiting and engaging thousands of census enumerators and supervisors through our web-based Human Resources Application. We remain committed to advance data-driven development."*

**Bibhushan Bista**

Co-founder, Young Innovations

## JULY 2021

Agreement between the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and UNFPA signed for support on the 2021 Census.

## SEPT.-NOV. 2021

Census fieldwork completed. The fieldwork involved almost 50,000 fieldworkers and 3,500 office-based support staff across the country.

## JANUARY 2022

Preliminary results released. Data visualisation platform profiling census results developed.

## MARCH 2023

National Census Report and data visualisation platform launched.

## MARCH – AUGUST 2024

Provincial, local, and urban/rural data released.

## BEYOND AUGUST 2024

Dissemination of thematic reports, atlas and population projections.



- » Development of a risk analysis highlighting socio-political issues that could arise during the census enumeration.
- » Support to census publicity, communications and advocacy prior to and during the enumeration, including nationwide engagement with the media and development and dissemination of social-media communication materials.
- » Consultations with hard-to-reach and potentially hard-to-count communities immediately before the census fieldwork to build awareness on why participation and self-identification is important for everyone.

- » Census observations arranged in 24 locations across every province of the country. The findings from the observations were provided as feedback to the National Statistics Office to support immediate corrective measures.
- » Guidance and key instruments and planning materials provided to the National Statistics Office for a Post Enumeration Survey to assess coverage and completeness of the 2021 Census.

- » Technical assistance for the development of a census dissemination plan.
- » Development of a risk analysis report prior to the launch of the census results at local and province levels to scan the environment on risks of government elections being linked to census results and negative public sentiment leading to potential conflict. The analysis helped the National Statistics Office better prepare for the release of the census data.
- » Capacity building to the National Statistics Office on data cleaning, editing and imputation.

- » Roll out of the data visualisation platform.
- » Support to the National Statistics Office with planning for development of thematic reports, a census atlas and population projections.

- » Roll out of expanded data visualisation platform as more census results released.
- » Organization of dissemination and sensitization workshops at provincial and local levels.
- » Development and roll-out of an interactive database linked to the census visualisation platform.
- » Development and roll-out of e-learning modules on use of the digital products.
- » Production of provincial level thematic reports, a census atlas and sub-national population projections, local government profiles, and reporting of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- » Production of policy briefs, thematic posters and factographs.

Nepal is gearing towards development of the 16th Plan by the National Planning Commission and Provincial Periodic Plans by the respective Provincial Policy and Planning Commissions and associated population policy updates. All of this will require further analysis of the census results and data from surveys and administrative sources.

The National Statistics Office will commence preparations for an inter-censal survey to fine-tune projections and key indicators for planning, monitoring and evaluation of development of the country.

These undertakings will require building capacity of the National Statistics Office and other relevant institutions and require further support by development partners to strengthen the overall statistical system in the country and promote evidence-based planning and monitoring for inclusive and sustainable development ahead of 2030 to ensure no one is left behind. This is particularly important as Nepal seeks to gain middle income status in 2026.

## KEY STREAMS OF WORK IN THE COVID-19 AND NEPAL CONTEXT

### 1.

#### The COVID-19 pandemic

The 2021 Census was scheduled in June 2021. However, the second wave of COVID-19 in May 2021 resulted in mobility restrictions and other health protocols and the census was postponed by the Government. The National Statistics Office re-convened training and fieldwork in September and completed the field work in November 2021. COVID-19 also reduced the government budget due to resource diversion for public health efforts. Most census preparatory activities had to be conducted virtually. The National Statistics Office received optimal support through the project, including sustained census capacity strengthening in the face of travel restrictions, financial constraints, operational choices, risks associated with the interruption and delays to ensure the census operations were undertaken in line with the government's timeline. Health safety measures included the procurement of essential personal protective equipment, producing guidelines on how to prevent/mitigate COVID-19 during field operations, and training field staff on the health safety procedures and protocols.

### 2.

#### Undertaking a multi-modal census

The National Statistics Office was introduced to the Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) method which was utilised in the Kathmandu Valley with tablets procured through the Census Support Project. Guidance and capacity building was provided on the effective use of CAPI. Since the census, the National Statistics Office will continue to use the tablets for more effective, higher quality data collection for household surveys, and faster access to results.

### 3.

#### Stakeholder consultations

The government budget earmarked for a full package of stakeholder consultations was reallocated. The Census Support Project provided the funds for continued dialogue between the National Statistics Office and key stakeholders by partnering with academic institutions and NGOs to support the National Statistics Office to conduct intensive national, sub-national and local consultations, including in hard-to-reach communities, on the importance of the census, and the utilization of census data for policy, advocacy and measuring the Sustainable Development Goals.



# 4.

## Census publicity and communication

Printed materials with June 2021 Census dates could not be used due to the postponement of the census. The government budget earmarked for this purpose had been fully utilised. The partnership considered this a real risk to mainstream awareness that the census was coming up and to full and active participation. The National Statistics Office was supported to design and roll out audio-visual and social media communication materials immediately before the census through a specialized national media organization.

# 5.

## Learning exchange

Due to COVID-19, many countries worldwide which were programmed to take their census as part of the 2020 round of censuses postponed their census. Therefore, there were very limited options for cross learning from other countries that the National Statistics Office could benefit from. UNFPA, through its regional office, organized a multi-country training workshop on census data dissemination in November 2022.

# 6.

## Inclusion of GESI perspectives

Ensuring GESI across all aspects and stages of the census was critical to ensure collection of more accurate and inclusive data that can better inform policies and programmes that promote equality, human rights and social justice.

Given the government's commitment to ensure that the 2021 Census would leave no one behind, the National Statistics Office established a GESI thematic committee which led incorporation of GESI perspectives into the overall planning and implementation of the census. Significant steps were taken to engage with diverse population groups in the design of the survey approaches, instruments, capacity building and public information strategy. In this context, the Census Support Project together with other Development Partners supported a GESI advocacy and communication strategy to achieve meaningful participation.

The strategy ensured GESI perspectives were in place as follows:

- » Particular attention was given to diverse marginalized populations, including women, vulnerable and excluded groups in the preparatory and enumeration stages. This included significant changes that were made to the census questionnaire. For instance, an "other sexual/gender" response category was included based on dialogue with the LGBTQI community.
- » Language questions were expanded based on inputs from the National Language Commission and relevant stakeholders to better capture linguistic identities.
- » A GESI reference book, manual and training modules for fieldworkers were developed and utilized.
- » Recruitment of census fieldworkers ensured they were suitably qualified and were of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds matching their location of recruitment and work.

*"Even in the midst of a global pandemic, the census became a beacon of hope, connecting communities and shedding light on their needs. Together, we navigated the uncharted territories, ensuring that no voice was left unheard. In these trying times, I realized that even amidst adversity, data holds the power to transform lives and bring about change."*

**Prakriti Patera**  
Census Enumerator



मेरो गणना  
मेरो सहभागिता  
राष्ट्रिय जनगणना २०७८

संख्येय तथाकृत विभाग  
राष्ट्रिय जनगणना २०७८

## STORY IN FOCUS

### EVERY YOUNG PERSON COUNTS

When she saw an opening to be part of the Population and Housing Census of Nepal 2021, Anjana Gautam duly filled the form and was shortlisted. After clearing the interview successfully, she enthusiastically started working with the National Statistics Office as a field supervisor.

As a supervisor, Anjana Gautam's role was to visit the enumeration area allotted to her and list the number of buildings in the locality, along with the number of residents per home. Based on this information, enumerators were deployed to the locality where they then collected detailed data on the persons and households in the buildings. Anjana Gautam's role as their supervisor was ensuring that all data collected from the field by enumerators was complete and accurate.

***"Some questionnaire forms came back [from the enumerators] with the age of the child higher than the age of the parent," Anjana Gautam said, "and some people's religion and ethnicity were incorrectly marked. So my main job was to verify all the data."***

After she spent two months as a field supervisor, Anjana Gautam subsequently was selected as a coder at the Thapathali office of the National Statistics Office during the data processing phase as a consequence of her attention to detail in the completeness and accuracy of the data collected.

During the fieldwork, a lot of data was collected by hand on a pre-printed form, but some enumerators also used tablets – a novel feature in the undertaking of the 12th Census in Nepal. The data collected by tablets get filtered automatically and do not allow for errors like the ones Anjana Gautam mentioned earlier. But the forms filled by hand are reviewed by coders to spot errors, after which the data is entered into the system.

In a country where young people aged between 16 and 40 make up 42.6% of the population, young people like Anjana Gautam made significant contributions to the undertaking of the 2021 Census as enumerators, coders, data entry personnel, and supervisors with some also working in more than one capacity. Before beginning work, they received the required training by the National Statistics Office which prepared them with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills to undertake the tasks entrusted to them.

"It definitely took me a little getting used to, but once I got the hang of things it became easier for me," said Retina Tuladhar, a 21-year-old student from Kathmandu who worked for about a year as an enumerator as well as a data entry operator for the census. The most challenging part of her job was staying focused for long periods of time, while entering data, and balancing university and work came a close second.

***"Managing my studies became easier once I started working morning shifts for data entry as I had classes only in the afternoon," said Retina Tuladhar, who has now completed an undergraduate degree in business administration.***

The best part about working a part time job like this is being part of the census which only comes around every 10 years, and of course with this, being associated with a government entity at a young age, plus not to mention the financial returns that come along with the job. Prakriti Patera was elated to share that she supported her own and her siblings' education by working as an enumerator and a coder during data processing, and was immensely proud that even as a student herself, her father did not have to be the only breadwinner in their home.

***"I am very much inspired by my own work, because I may be working at the foundational level but I have contributed to so many policies and even the national budget that will be devised out of the data I collected from the field and entered by my own hands," she said. "My biggest takeaway from this experience is being able to fulfill targeted goals. By the end of it, I was so fast and efficient at working on a computer, I am now prepared to take on any other jobs."***

Unlike surveys which are sample based, what defines a census is its universal coverage. As such it is a huge undertaking. Given the significance and the magnitude of the tasks involved, it is only fitting that many people – young people, development partners, governments at all levels – are involved in the census.

Today, major demographic shifts are occurring in many countries, including Nepal, where countries are experiencing a youth bulge. Hence, accurate and timely data are more important than ever to assess how best to invest in young people. As such, the collection, analysis and dissemination of census data for development is a critical part of UNFPA's mandate – because every young person counts.

## CENSUS KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

The population in Nepal is

**29.2 MILLION,**

up from **26.5 million in 2011**. The growth rate has dropped steadily from **2.3% in 2001** to

**0.9%** ↓

**in 2021** because of a *declining fertility rate* and **increased migration abroad**.



Nepal is experiencing a youth bulge with

**5.7 MILLION**

people aged 15 to 24 years, comprising **20% of the population**. This paves the way for economic growth **if the right investments are made for young people, especially on girls' health and education**.



Nepal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in Asia, despite laws against it. In fact, preliminary analysis from the latest census shows that **one in five** women (22%) marry as children.

**3%** are **married before turning 15**.



Source: Preliminary analysis from the 2021 Census

The percentage of **households headed by women** has risen from

**25.7%**

in 2011 to almost one in three which is

**31.5%**

in 2021.



In 2021, there were

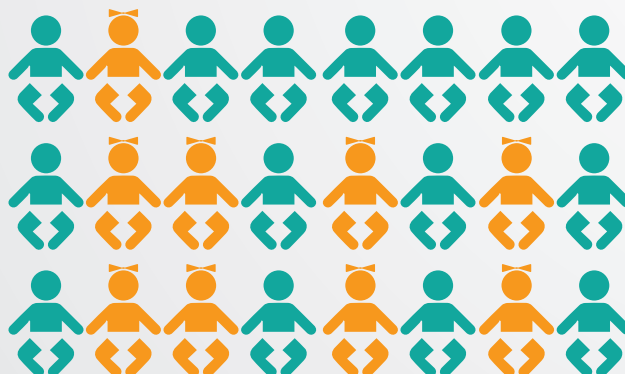
**112 baby boys**

born for every

**100 baby girls**

born, up from the 107 baby boys born for every 100 baby girls born in 2011 – indicating a **growing preference for sons**.

Note: Generally, the natural sex ratio at birth is around 105 boys per 100 girls.



Source: Preliminary analysis from the 2021 Census

Globally, every two minutes a woman dies due to pregnancy or childbirth related complications while in Nepal,

**2 women die every day.**

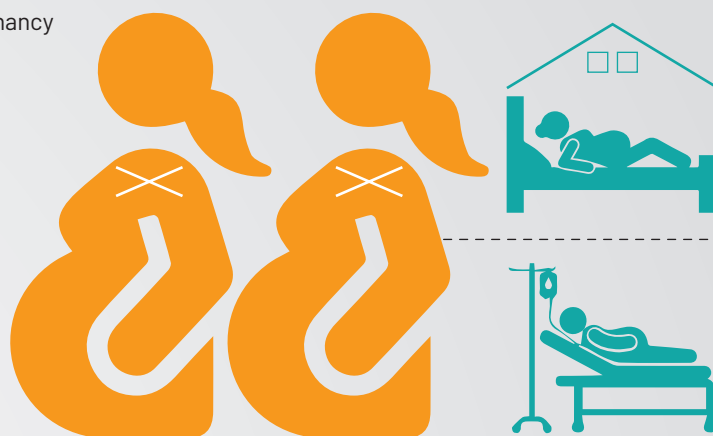
Most of these deaths are preventable.

About

**57%**  
of deaths  
occur in health  
facilities,

**26%**  
occur at home.

**17%**  
occur on the  
way to the  
health facilities.



Source: Maternal Mortality Study following the 2021 Census

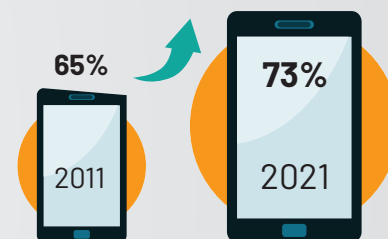
**Households with access to the internet** increased from 3% in 2011 to

**38%** ↑  
in 2021.



**Access to mobile phones** increased from 65% in 2011 to

**73%**  
in 2021.



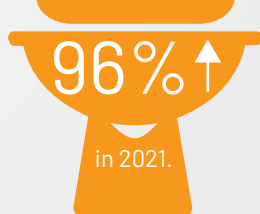
**Households with access to electricity** increased from 67% in 2011 to

**92%** ↑  
in 2021.



The proportion of **households with access to a toilet** has increased from 62% in 2011 to

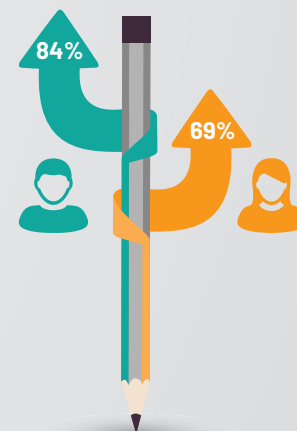
**96%** ↑  
in 2021.



**The literacy rate** has been progressing over the years and currently lies at

**76%** ↑

up from 66% in 2011. There is still however a **gender gap**. Around 84% of men are literate compared to 69% of women.





UNFPA, the British Embassy Kathmandu and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation wish to express gratitude to the National Statistics Office for the opportunity to support the 2021 Population and Housing Census through the Census Support Project.





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