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# GENDER EQUALITY UPDATE - 29

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NEEDS AND CHALLENGES FACING  
VULNERABLE AND EXCLUDED  
GROUPS IN NEPAL  
JUNE, 2021



# INTRODUCTION

Nepal's devastating second wave of COVID-19 has been particularly challenging for vulnerable groups. The Gender in Humanitarian Action Task Team Meeting, which was held on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021, focused on their immediate needs and challenges during this time. The meeting had representatives from the following communities and networks: LGBTIQ+, single women, returnee migrant women, home-based workers, sex workers, women with disabilities, indigenous women, Dalit women, Madhesi women, Muslim women, and people working in humanitarian and Disaster Risk Reduction, among others.

## COVID-19 HIGHLIGHTS FROM MAY 15-21, 2021.



115,852  
**ACTIVE CASES**



57,454  
**NEW CASES**



44.2%  
**CASE POSITIVITY**



488,645  
**TOTAL CASES**



5,847  
**TOTAL DEATHS**

SOURCE - Nepal: COVID-19 Pandemic  
Office of UN Resident Coordinator  
[Situation Report No. 37](#) as of 21 May, 2021

*A nurse at Koshish Nepal checks the oxygen level of a person seeking mental health services in their Transit Home. Photo: Courtesy of Sangam Khatri*



# Key needs of vulnerable and excluded groups during the current COVID-19 wave:



**VACCINE:** Only 5,31,568 people in Nepal have been fully vaccinated. There is an urgent need to vaccinate vulnerable populations.



**MENTAL HEALTH:** Multiple factors are affecting people's mental wellbeing during the pandemic, such as livelihood loss and an increase in gender-based violence (GBV), including domestic violence. There is a critical need for free mental health services to prevent suicide and to promote mental wellbeing. These services should be available at the local level, so that they are accessible to all communities.



**RISK COMMUNICATION:** Information about the vaccine rollout and safety precautions has not reached vulnerable groups. There is a need to customize information for each vulnerable group, including translating it into local languages and ensuring the content is accessible for persons with disability. This would ensure that everyone has the information necessary to stay safe during the pandemic.



**ACCESS TO MEDICAL FACILITIES:** Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing services should be available at the ward level, and not just in urban hubs. Every community should have convenient and continual access to sexual, reproductive, and maternal health services inside hospitals, as well as access to health education. Similarly, people with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) should be able to continue their antiretroviral therapy (ART) treatment and trans people should be able to continue hormone therapy. These medical services were not classified as “essential” during lockdown and many people have been unable to access them. Seeking emergency medical services has also been challenging during COVID-19 prohibitory orders, and there is a need to promote information about where people can go in cases of emergencies.

# Key needs of vulnerable and excluded groups during the current COVID-19 wave:



**CASH AND IN-KIND SUPPORT:** Many people have lost their jobs and used up their savings. Providing relief packages and economic support including cash is key to helping people cope during the current COVID-19 wave. Relief packages must include nutritious food and COVID-19 kits with masks, medicine, a thermometer, and an oximeter with instructions on how to use them. Similarly, economic support is needed to help people pay their rent and other basic expenses.



**SAFETY AND SECURITY FROM GBV:** As cases of GBV increase during lockdown, rescue services, psychosocial and legal counselling, and safe homes must continue to be provisioned. Similarly, short-term and long-term shelter homes should be made available for returnee migrant women who cannot go back to their families. Since many families do not accept the sexuality and gender identity of their LGBTIQ+ relatives, the government needs to ensure that they have access to social security measures and ensure their safety.



**ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE CENTERS:** Currently, COVID-19 isolation centers have only been made available to men and women. These spaces should be LGBTIQ+ community friendly. They should also be made accessible for people living in shared spaces who need to isolate after testing positive for COVID-19. Similarly, the spaces should be made accessible to lactating mothers and pregnant women.



**CHILDCARE SUPPORT:** Childcare should be made available for children when their guardians are in the hospital or isolation centers. There should also be outreach encouraging the equal sharing of household chores between all family members.



# Key challenges faced by vulnerable and excluded groups during the current COVID-19 wave:



**LEADERSHIP ROLES IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE:** When planning its response, the government has taken a binary approach that focuses only on men and women. There is a need to put the LGBTIQ+ community and other vulnerable groups at the forefront of this response. This will help ensure that no one is left behind and that the response caters to the unique needs and diversity within Nepal's most vulnerable groups.



**IDENTITY CARD FOR VACCINATION:** Having a government document that states a person's name, age and address is required to receive the vaccine. Persons without such government documents can request for a recommendation letter from their local ward office to get the vaccine. However, those who are most marginalized are finding it difficult to access the vaccines.



**DISAGGREGATED DATA:** Without disaggregated data on gender, disability, marital status, caste, indigenous groups and returnee migrants, it is difficult to assess the needs of these vulnerable groups and tailor the response accordingly.

A woman with vaccination card after taking the COVID-19 vaccine. Photo: UNICEF/L.Ngakhusi



# 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



Photo: Courtesy of Lily Thapa



All photos: Courtesy of Sangam Khatri



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