



## Nepali refugee students: Cultural background profiles

### Language

Nepali, Newari, Tibet-Burman languages, Indo-Aryan languages, and English

### Teaching in the Classroom

Nepal's curriculum from the 1950s to the 1970s was influenced by US schools and developed with help from UNESCO. Many teachers are untrained, however. Education is not compulsory across the country, but the government does provide free primary education for children of all castes between the ages of five and 12, although most students bore some costs for examinations and had to buy uniforms. The government reported that more than 95% of school-age children attended primary schools.



A gender gap in education persisted with a reported two-thirds of adolescent girls in rural areas not attending school. Literacy rates for women were approximately 44.5% as opposed to 71% for men. Many school-age girls do not attend school due to the absence of separate or proper toilets. However, according to the State of the World's Children 2016 report, this gender gap is narrowing. For example, today 90% of boys ages 15-24 are literate and 80% of girls 15-25 are literate. Also, 62% of girls are enrolled in high school as opposed to 58% of boys who enroll in high school.

Despite good progress in enhancing equal access to basic education (grades 1-8), children, especially the poorest, do not continue to post-basic education, and the quality of education at all levels remains a problem. Access, repetition, dropping out and truancy are the remarkable issues in rural areas. Significant segments of the child population are still not attending school. However, it is still the generally held belief that education is a gateway for better life and everyday living.

### Family/School Engagement

The most common type of asylum claim from Nepal is one based on fear of harm from



the government. Many applicants claim that they have suffered past persecution or fear future persecution on account of their political opinion. It is good to be sensitive as a teacher that parents may have a particular fear of government.

It is important to keep in mind that many refugees do not know how to drive or lack access to a car, so transportation to school events will be a challenge even if parents want to be involved.

In Nepal, people especially women, do not normally shake hands when they greet one another, but instead press palms together in a prayer-like gesture known “Namaste”. To show gratitude and respect, use both of your hands rather than one when giving or receiving something, even money. It’s seen as a gesture of respect. Among Hindus, avoid touching women and holy men. Raising your voice or shouting is seen as extremely bad manners in Nepal.

In Nepal, the first meal is served around 10:30 a.m. and the second shortly after sunset. The slaughter of cows is forbidden, and Nepalese do not eat beef. A custom in Nepal is *jutho*, which translates as “contaminated” and requires people not to touch others’ food and drink with either their hands or their spoon. When drinking water, Nepalese people will not touch the bottle or glass to their lips so that others can drink from it also. Don’t eat from someone else’s plate or offer food you have taken a bite of.

Another custom is the idea that the foot is ritually dirty and therefore stepping over food or pointing the soles of your feet is disrespectful.

### **Culture, Gender and Family**

The majority (over 80%) of Nepalis are Hindu. 9% are Buddhist, and a significant portion of the population may identify themselves as Buddhist and Hindu, the beliefs of which intermingle without conflict. 4.4% of Nepalis are Muslim and 1.4% are Christian.

One basic concept in Hinduism is that of *dharma*, or natural law, which holds that people should play their proper and determined role in society. The caste system is an integral part of *dharma*. Each person is born into a particular caste, whose traditional occupation is graded according to the degree of purity and impurity inherent in it.



The rigidly patriarchal system that dominates Nepal is demonstrated through women's general subservience to men in virtually every aspect of daily life. While there are exceptions to this among particular ethnic groups, women fulfil traditional roles such as fetching water, doing farm work, and cooking meals.