

Re-Engineering the Digital Assembly: Strategic Fiscal Interventions for Gender Parity in Nepal's Technology Sector

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A policy memorandum on the FY 2083/84 (2026/27) federal budget, informed by original survey and interview research

Executive Summary

Nepal's technology sector employs women at 7.88% of the ICT workforce, against 51.02% of the population and a majority of university enrollment; the gap widens further in engineering programs and senior leadership, where women hold 19.55% of executive and managerial roles. The FY 2083/84 budget commits new capital and tax instruments to the sector, including a 1% capital expenditure floor for science and technology, a Sovereign AI Compute Center, and a reduced IT export tax exemption, without a single gender condition, target, or reporting requirement attached to any of them. The government's stated target of 500,000 technology jobs by 2034 exceeds domestic graduate output by roughly a factor of five, with no published labor-supply plan to close the gap; women represent the only domestic labor pool of sufficient scale to do so.

This memorandum draws on an original survey (n=41) and four in-depth interviews conducted in Nepal's technology sector in June–July 2026, corroborated against national data from WIIT and IIDS. The findings identify exclusion operating at multiple stages: 82.9% of respondents have declined to apply for a job they were qualified for, citing unmanageable care responsibilities and expected rejection in comparable measure; 61% identify childbirth as the career stage at which women are most likely to leave the sector; 51.2% report personally experiencing a pay gap against a national figure of 87.9% reporting parity; and 68.3% lack a discrimination-reporting mechanism they trust. Respondents do not oppose the sector's new fiscal incentives outright but distinguish sharply between forms: support for the export tax exemption rises from 29% to 61% when it is conditioned on a firm's female employment share, a distinction interview evidence corroborates from the employer side, where referral-driven hiring was shown to reproduce the sector's existing gender composition.

The recommendations that follow are organized by actor, fiscal conditions the government can attach to instruments already funded, standards firms can adopt without legislation, and networks available to women directly, and require no new appropriation. This design is supported by comparative precedent from Japan, South Korea, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, where analogous conditional instruments improved workforce participation but left seniority largely unchanged, indicating that conditions must be written above the point of hire to be effective.

I. Baseline: The Gender Disparity in Nepal's Technology Sector

Nepal's transition toward a digital economy is occurring against deep structural gender imbalance. Women are the statistical majority of the national population, yet their presence in the formal technology workforce is minimal. Data compiled by Women in Information Technology (WIIT) and the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) reveal a stark divergence between demographic representation and economic participation.

Indicator	Value	Source
Women as share of national population	51.02%	Census 2021, via WIIT
Women in ICT company workforce	7.88%	WIIT, survey of 402 ICT companies
Women in ICT-enabled company workforce	0.51%	WIIT, survey of 400 non-IT-primary firms
Female share of regular full-time staff, IT companies	16.00%	IIDS, survey of 86 IT companies
Women as share of economically active persons in ICT	0.50%	OPMCM (2024) and Census, via WIIT ¹
Registered female engineers in ICT	13.55%	Nepal Engineering Council, via WIIT
Women ICT professionals in executive, director, or senior managerial roles	19.55%	WIIT
Women ICT professionals aged 18–35	89.22%	WIIT, n = 430 women
Women's share of social media users	43.60%	DataReportal, <i>Digital 2024: Nepal</i>

The contrast between digital access and professional employment points to a structural exclusion, not a technological one: women are 43.6% of active social media users but under 8% of the core ICT workforce. IIDS adds a finding about where in the workforce women sit. In its survey of 86 IT companies, 84% of full-time managerial and technical staff are men and 16% are women — while part-time technical staff are close to evenly split. The report's own conclusion is that gender equality is being relegated to part-time technical staff "as a tokenistic gesture."¹

The University Pipeline

Women are not underrepresented in Nepali higher education; they are the majority of it. In 2023/24, 633,053 students were enrolled across Nepal's universities and medical academies, of whom 358,140 — 56.57% — were women. The Gender Parity Index for higher education enrolment stands at 1.3, and the gross enrolment ratio for women aged 18–22 is 24.6% against

¹ Institute for Integrated Development Studies, *Unleashing IT: Advancing Nepal's Digital Economy* (Kathmandu: IIDS, 2023), 19, <https://iids.org.np/portfolio/unleashing-it-advancing-nepals-digital-economy/>.

17.8% for men.² The number of women studying computing rose from 1,117 in 2011 to 11,078 in 2021.³

The narrowing happens inside technical education. Women are 57.61% of bachelor's enrolment but 24.40% of the Engineering faculty (8,168 of 33,474 students) and 39.17% of Science and Technology (17,188 of 43,886). Within Tribhuvan University's undergraduate ICT programs specifically, women are 30.28%; at Kathmandu University the figure falls to 13.55%, and most postgraduate programs report below 20% female enrolment. For comparison, Thailand and the Philippines each report women as 48% of technology graduates.

Attrition compounds at every level of qualification. Women hold 57.61% of bachelor's places, 48.71% of master's, 22.42% of MPhil, and 17.69% of PhD enrolments.⁴ Among women already working in ICT, 67.11% hold a bachelor's degree and a further 20.95% a master's — credentials are not the constraint.⁵

The survey and interviews describe the same funnel from inside it. 14.6% of survey respondents were current university students. The QC engineer interviewed for this memorandum, a 2024 IT graduate, counted roughly five women in her graduating class. The data specialist, who also teaches secondary school, traced the constriction earlier still: female participation is already thin in grades 6–10, and schools "simply do not have enough computers."

The Pipeline Bottleneck and Attrition Mechanics

The gender gap is a hiring and retention bottleneck. Women hold 13.55% of ICT engineering registrations with the Nepal Engineering Council but only 7.88% of positions in ICT companies. Because these figures describe different populations rather than a tracked cohort, they do not measure attrition directly. Still, the direction is consistent and unexplained: credentialing runs roughly twice ahead of employment. That no dataset exists which would let anyone measure the flow directly is itself a finding.

Attrition then intensifies with career progression. WIIT finds 89.22% of women ICT professionals are aged 18–35, falling to 9.78% at ages 36–45 — a decline the report attributes to expectations surrounding marriage, household management, and child-rearing.⁶ Only 19.55% of women in the sector hold executive, director, or senior managerial roles.⁷ The scarcity of visible

² University Grants Commission, Report on Higher Education 2023/024 A.D. (2080/081 B.S.): Education Management Information System (Sanathimi, Bhaktapur: University Grants Commission, 2024), 1, 31, 38, https://giwmscdnone.gov.np/media/pdf_upload/EMIS%202023-24_mu8su0b.pdf.

³ "Women in Tech: Nepali Women Driving Change in ICT," New Business Age, <https://newbusinessage.com/news/40961/women-in-tech-nepali-women-driving-change-in-ict/>. The article attributes the figures to Census 2021 data.

⁴ UGC, *Report on Higher Education 2023/024*, 22, table 3.5

⁵ WIIT, *Barriers to Breakthroughs*, 9.

⁶ Nepal Engineering Council data, quoted in WIIT, *Barriers to Breakthroughs*, 8.

⁷ WIIT, *Barriers to Breakthroughs*, 9.

female leaders discourages junior entry, while unconscious bias in hiring and promotion continues to pass the qualified women.

The Economic Cost of Exclusion

The exclusion is occurring in the one sector where Nepal has demonstrated genuine export competitiveness. IIDS valued IT service exports at USD 515 million in 2022, a 64.2% increase in a single year, accounting for 1.4% of GDP and 5.5% of foreign exchange reserves.⁸ By early 2026, the industry association NAS-IT estimated annual exports at roughly NPR 145 billion (about USD 1 billion)⁹ — an industry estimate rather than a completed study, and one that illustrates the measurement problem it is trying to describe: official statistics recorded telecommunications, computer and information services exports at only NPR 22.33 billion in FY 2024/25, because most IT earnings enter the country recorded as remittance rather than as service exports.¹⁰ The sector is central to the government's 7% growth target, and it is being built on a labor pool drawn from less than half the educated population. Regional evidence indicates the scale of what is forgone: McKinsey Global Institute estimates that advancing women's equality could add several hundred billion dollars to India's GDP.¹¹ For a country attempting to shift from a labor-export economy to a digital services hub, leaving the demographic majority outside a billion-dollar export industry is a strategic failure.

II. The Sector Nepal Is Building

Nepal's FY 2083/84 budget treats technology as a growth engine, but it does so almost entirely through tax policy and asset sales rather than appropriations. The budget contains no consolidated technology envelope.¹² Tech-relevant spending is distributed across the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, the new Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, and various financial management lines.

The named allocations are modest. NPR 5.93 billion goes to the information and communication sector — broadly consistent with prior years, and committed to the Telecommunications Authority Bill, telecom expansion in Karnali and Sudurpashchim, a consolidated government printing entity, and a social media promotion line rather than to the IT industry. NPR 4 billion goes to science, technology and innovation, a figure that also covers an

⁸ IIDS, *Unleashing IT*, VII; see also 10, 15.

⁹ "Nepal's IT Service Exports Reach Estimated Rs145 Billion Annually," Fiscal Nepal, February 12, 2026, <https://www.fiscalnepal.com/2026/02/12/24432/nepals-it-service-exports-reach-estimated-rs145-billion-annually/>.

¹⁰ "Foreign Study Costs Outpace Growth in Nepal's Service Exports," *Kathmandu Post*, July 20, 2026, <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2026/07/20/foreign-study-costs-outpace-growth-in-nepal-s-service-exports>.

¹¹ McKinsey Global Institute, *The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in India, 2018* (McKinsey & Company, 2018), <https://www.mckinsey.com/in/our-insights/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-india-2018>.

¹² Team TechSansar, "Nepal Budget 2083/84: A Comprehensive Reference on the Tech, IT and Innovation Provisions," TechSansar, May 30, 2026, <https://techsansar.com/computing/nepal-budget-2083-84-tech-it-innovation-reference/>.

astronomical observatory at Sagarmatha base camp. The Nepal Enterprise Facility receives NPR 500 million. The most substantial new commitment is a floor of 1% of capital expenditure reserved for science, technology research and innovation — approximately NPR 4.3 billion. The Sovereign AI Compute Center, the budget's flagship technology commitment, is not costed in the published text at all; it is expected to draw in part on the Mathrubhumi Fund, a sovereign vehicle capitalized from foreign exchange reserves.

One provision requires correction in the public record, because it has been widely reported as an expansion. The 50% export exemption is a reduction: the FY 2082/83 budget granted 75% on the same earnings, and the current budget cuts that concession by a third while leaving its design untouched.¹³

The ambition

The fiscal commitment is matched by an employment target. Through the FY 2024/25 budget the government set out to create 500,000 direct jobs and one million indirect jobs in information technology over a decade, a commitment carried forward under the "Decade of Information Technology" framing toward 2034.¹⁴

Against that target, the sector's current size is modest. Industry estimates put employment at roughly 100,000 people, up from the 70,000-plus recorded in the 2022 IIDS survey, with the sector growing at approximately 18–20% annually and 90% of employment concentrated in Kathmandu.¹⁵ The 500,000 figure derives from extrapolating that growth rate forward: if employment compounds at around 18% per year, it reaches 500,000 within ten years.¹⁶

The arithmetic

That extrapolation describes a rate. It does not identify a workforce. Reaching 500,000 from 100,000 requires 400,000 additional workers. Nepal's educational institutions produce approximately 9,000 IT graduates each year.¹⁷ Over a decade, at current output, that is roughly 90,000 people — and only if every graduate enters the sector, remains in Nepal, and never leaves it. Domestic graduate output, under maximally favorable assumptions, supplies something in the region of a fifth of the requirement.

Two qualifications are owed. "Tech-enabled jobs" are a broader category than roles requiring an IT degree, encompassing business process outsourcing, IT-enabled services, and

¹³ "Budget 2083/84 Tax Changes in Nepal — FY 2026/27," Law Alpine, June 11, 2026, <https://lawalpine.com/blog/budget-2083-84-tax-changes-in-nepal>.

¹⁴ "Digital Nepal Framework 2.0: Preparations Underway to Boost IT Export Capacity," *New Business Age*, <https://newbusinessage.com/news/43080/digital-nepal-framework-20-preparations-underway-to-boost-it-export-capacity/>.

¹⁵ "Nepal's IT Exports Near \$1 Billion. Can the Momentum Be Sustained?," *Kathmandu Post*, February 25, 2026, <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2026/02/25/nepal-s-it-exports-near-1-billion-can-the-momentum-be-sustained>.

¹⁶ "Nepal's IT Exports Near \$1 Billion," *Kathmandu Post*.

¹⁷ IIDS, *Unleashing IT*, 9.

support functions that draw from a wider talent pool; the comparison with IT graduate output is therefore indicative rather than exact. And Nepal's IT workforce already extends well beyond salaried employees — the IIDS survey identified 66,509 online freelancers alongside 7,228 staff at export companies.¹⁸ Neither qualification closes a gap of this magnitude. On any reasonable definition, the target substantially exceeds what the domestic pipeline can supply.

The outflow of students compounds the problem rather than causing it. More than 112,000 No Objection Certificates for foreign study were issued in a single year, close to double the pre-pandemic figure, with Nepali families officially exchanging NPR 117 billion for overseas education costs.¹⁹ But the shortfall does not depend on emigration. No published document reconciles them. The 500,000 figure rests on a growth-rate projection; no labor-supply plan has been produced setting out where the workers are to come from.

The omission

There is one labor pool in Nepal large enough to matter at this scale, and the budget does not mention it. Women are 56.57% of higher education enrollment and 7.88% of the ICT company workforce.²⁰ Closing even part of that gap represents the single largest available source of domestic technical labor — larger than any plausible increase in graduate output, and available without reversing emigration.

Not one instrument in the FY 2083/84 technology package carries a gender condition, target, or reporting requirement. Nepal maintains a gender-responsive budgeting system, and the budget speech is accompanied by a gender-responsive breakdown among its annexes — but the classification exercise runs parallel to the technology agenda rather than into it. The Ministry of Women, Children, Gender and Sexual Minorities, and Social Security received NPR 2.27 billion for its programs, an increase of roughly NPR 200 million on the previous year, directed toward Dalit communities, persons with disabilities, senior citizens and street children.²¹ Nothing in it touches the digital economy, and nothing in the digital economy provisions touches gender.

The absence extends to measurement. Asked about the composition of the 100,000-person workforce underpinning the government's target, the industry's own association reported that detailed breakdowns — gender participation, salary ranges, the split between full-time and freelance work — are not available.²² The sector that has committed to a fivefold expansion cannot say what share of its existing workforce is female. That is the condition this memorandum's original research was designed to address.

¹⁸ IIDS, *Unleashing IT*, 19.

¹⁹ "Brain Gain into Brain Drain," *Nepali Times*, August 9, 2024, <https://nepalitimes.com/brain-gain-into-brain-drain>.

²⁰ UGC, *Report on Higher Education 2023/024*, 1; WIIT, *Barriers to Breakthroughs*, 8.

²¹ "Government Doubles Child Nutrition Allowance, Widens Social Security Spending," *Kathmandu Post*, May 30, 2026, <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2026/05/30/government-doubles-child-nutrition-allowance-widens-social-security-spending>.

²² "Nepal's IT Exports Near \$1 Billion," *Kathmandu Post*.

III. Original Research: Methodology

To test whether the published national statistics reflect conditions on the ground, this memorandum draws on two original instruments fielded in June–July 2026.

- **Anonymous survey (n = 41).** A structured questionnaire was distributed through professional and university networks to women currently working in, trained for, or recently departed from Nepal's technology sector. Of 46 total responses, 41 were from women and form the analytical sample; male responses were excluded. Respondents span the sector: 31.7% software developers/engineers, 14.6% data/AI/analytics, 12.2% IT support and operations, 9.8% product and program management, 7.3% executive leadership, with the remainder in internships, sales, or university study. Experience ranges from current students (14.6%) to professionals with 10+ years (7.3%); the largest cohorts have under 2 years (29.3%) and 2–4 years (24.4%) of experience. 95.1% are based in the Kathmandu Valley.
- **In-depth interviews (n = 4).** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with (a) a QC software engineer at a Lalitpur-based technology firm; (b) a software engineering manager with hiring responsibility for 60–70 staff at the same firm; (c) a data analysis and research specialist with a computer engineering degree and dual master's degrees who also teaches secondary school; and (d) a product and research professional who now mentors technology fellows remotely for a U.S. university program, who responded in writing. Interviewees are identified by role only.

Limitations. The survey sample is small, non-random, recruited through snowball referral, and concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley. Findings are indicative rather than nationally representative and are presented alongside, not in place of, the published national data. Where the two conflict, most notably on pay, the conflict itself is treated as a finding that justifies better official data collection.

IV. Most Significant Survey Findings

Finding 1: Gendered treatment in hiring is the norm.

Asked how much gender played a role in how they were treated during hiring (1–5 scale), respondents averaged 3.3, and 53.7% answered 4 or 5. Only 12.2% cited overt gender bias from interviewers as their single biggest entry barrier, but open-ended responses describe its texture: one developer wrote that interviews “felt very unwelcoming,” with interviewers asking, “strange questions sometimes about my family or future plans.” The single most-cited entry barrier was limited professional networks or connections (41.5%), followed by family pressure or expectations (17.1%) and insufficient practical training (12.2%). Half of respondents (51.2%) described getting their first job as making effort but being straightforward; 24.4% faced what they described as systemic barriers before landing a role, and 7.3% were never able to get a tech job at all.

Finding 2: Self-selection is removing women from applicant pools before hiring even begins

82.9% of respondents have at some point decided not to apply to a tech job they were qualified for. Among them, the reasons split into two families: logistics of unpaid care work — the location or hours were unmanageable given home responsibilities (44.1%) — and internalized expectation of rejection — “I didn't think I would be selected” (23.5%) or “I lacked the confidence despite being qualified” (17.6%). A further 11.8% were deterred by workplace cultures that seemed unwelcome. This finding matters for policy design: a hiring manager reviewing applications never observes these women. Any intervention that operates only at the interview stage arrives too late.

Finding 3: Attrition clusters around childbearing, and retention is under strain even among those who stay

61% of respondents identified “after having children, regardless of age” as the career stage at which women are most likely to leave tech — more than three times the next-most-cited stage (early career, 19.5%). One senior respondent put it plainly in Nepali: “sabai keti haru child bhae pachi leave garchhan” — all the women leave after having a child. The pattern is not hypothetical: 51.2% of respondents have themselves seriously considered leaving the sector (41.5% considered but stayed; 9.8% left). Among those who considered leaving, the most-cited reasons were better opportunities abroad or in another sector, hostile or unwelcoming workplace environments, and no clear path to promotion or leadership. Asked about women they personally know who left, respondents most often cited no promotion opportunities (31.7%) and moving abroad (24.4%). One respondent with an engineering degree wrote: “Many women are in leadership roles or administrative roles only. I left because I didn't actually use my engineering degree.”

Finding 4: The pay-parity consensus is contradicted by lived experience

The WIIT finding that 87.9% of women in Nepal's ICT sector report equal pay has anchored the assumption that compensation is not the problem. This survey asked respondents directly whether that statistic matched their experience. It did not: 51.2% reported personally experiencing a pay gap, only 19.5% reported parity, and 26.8% said they do not know what their male colleagues earn. The written interviewee offered a reconciliation consistent with the survey split: parity “might be true” in technical roles, but “in technology management roles maybe not.” Given the sample limitations noted above, this result should not be read as overturning the national figure — but it is sufficient to establish that pay parity cannot be assumed, and that pay opacity (over a quarter of respondents cannot even assess their own situation) is itself a policy problem. Transparent salary scales were the third-most-demanded workplace benefit in the survey (44%).

Finding 5: Accountability mechanisms exist on paper and are not trusted

Only 10% of respondents both have a formal mechanism at work to report gender discrimination or harassment and trust it to be effective. Half have a mechanism they do not trust; 20% have no mechanism at all; the rest are unsure. Combined with the 8 of 24 leave-considering

respondents who cited hostile or unwelcoming environments, this suggests workplace-culture problems persist not because rules are absent but because enforcement is not credible.

Finding 6: Workers support the new tax incentives only if they are conditional

Respondents were asked whether the FY 2083/84 budget's tax breaks for tech companies — including the 50% income tax exemption on IT exports — will benefit women in tech. Only 29.3% said yes on the theory that sector-wide investment lifts everyone. The largest bloc, 36.6%, said the breaks will help only if companies are specifically required to hire more women, and 26.8% said no, because women face structural and societal barriers that tax breaks won't fix. But when the incentive was made conditional — an additional tax bonus for every percentage-point increase in female employees — support consolidated: the mean effectiveness rating was 3.8 of 5, with 61% rating it 4 or 5. The distinction respondents are drawing is precise, and it is the central design principle of this memorandum: untargeted tax expenditure is expected to bypass women; the same fiscal instrument with an equity condition attached is expected to work.

Finding 7: What women say would actually help

Asked which government actions would most directly help women enter and stay in tech, the leading answers were additional tax benefits for companies that provide childcare support (27%), requiring companies to publicly report how many women they employ (22%), earmarked funds for women-led startups (20%), funding women's coding bootcamps and ICT scholarships (17%), and stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination protections in hiring (15%). Asked which workplace benefit would most have changed their own experience, respondents chose flexible or remote work options (56%), a formal mentorship or sponsorship program (51%), and transparent salary scales (44%), ahead of extended paid maternity leave (22%) and subsidized or onsite childcare (10%). On the budget's new remote work law, 51.2% said it will help women because flexibility is a major barrier, 22% said it will help only if it includes strong maternity leave protections, and 22% said the bigger barriers are in hiring, not flexibility. Among the 24 respondents who have considered starting a tech venture, the leading funding barriers were the absence of government grants or seed funding for women entrepreneurs (9), collateral requirements for bank loans (6), complex regulatory registration (5), and male-dominated venture networks (4).

Survey indicator	Count / denominator	Basis
Rated gender's role in hiring treatment 4–5 out of 5	22 / 41 (53.7%)	All women
Biggest entry barrier: limited professional network or connections	17 / 41 (41.5%)	All women
Ever declined to apply for a job they were qualified for	34 / 41 (82.9%)	All women
Among those who declined to apply hours/location unmanageable given home responsibilities	15 / 34 (44.1%)	Declined-to-apply subgroup
Have considered leaving the sector or already left	21 / 41 (51.2%)	All women

Survey indicator	Count / denominator	Basis
Women most likely to leave tech after having children	25 / 41 (61.0%)	All women
Report personally experiencing a pay gap	21 / 41 (51.2%)	All women
Do not know what male colleagues earn	11 / 41 (26.8%)	All women
Have a trusted workplace discrimination-reporting mechanism	4 / 40 (10.0%)	Answered mechanism question
Have no trusted mechanism: no mechanism or mechanism not trusted	28 / 41 (68.3%)	All women
Blanket tax breaks will benefit women without conditions	12 / 41 (29.3%)	All women
Rated a conditional female-employment tax bonus 4–5 out of 5	25 / 41 (61.0%)	All women
Desired benefit: flexible or remote work options	23 / 41 (56.1%)	Multi-select
Desired benefit: formal mentorship or sponsorship program	21 / 41 (51.2%)	Multi-select

Table 2. Key survey results recalculated from the response data. Each row reports its own count and denominator, with the percentage shown in parentheses; subgroup rows use the relevant follow-up denominator rather than the full sample.

Tiered Ranking of Quantified Survey Findings

The table below ranks the recalculated survey indicators by percentage while preserving each row's actual denominator. Percentages are not directly comparable when the denominator changes, so subgroup rows are labeled clearly.

Tier	Finding, ranked high to low	Count / denominator
Tier 1	Ever declined to apply for a qualified job	34 / 41 (82.9%)
Tier 1	No trusted discrimination-reporting mechanism	28 / 41 (68.3%)
Tier 1	Women most likely to leave after having children	25 / 41 (61.0%)
Tier 1	Rated conditional female-employment tax bonus 4–5	25 / 41 (61.0%)
Tier 1	Desired flexible or remote work options	23 / 41 (56.1%)
Tier 1	Rated gender's role in hiring treatment 4–5	22 / 41 (53.7%)
Tier 1	Considered leaving or already left	21 / 41 (51.2%)
Tier 1	Personally experienced a pay gap	21 / 41 (51.2%)
Tier 1	Desired mentorship or sponsorship	21 / 41 (51.2%)
Tier 2	Among decliners: hours/location unmanageable	15 / 34 (44.1%)
Tier 2	Biggest entry barrier: limited network	17 / 41 (41.5%)
Tier 2	Blanket tax breaks will benefit women without conditions	12 / 41 (29.3%)
Tier 2	Do not know what male colleagues earn	11 / 41 (26.8%)

Table 3. Recalculated ranked survey indicators. Tier 1 = 50% or higher; Tier 2 = 25%–49.9%; subgroup findings retain their own denominators.

What Women Believe Is the Problem

The table below separates problem diagnosis from proposed solutions. It uses the quantified findings in Section IV to show what respondents identified as the barriers pushing women out of applications, hiring, retention, pay equity, and workplace accountability.

Problem area	Quantified evidence	Result
Self-selection before hiring	Women have declined to apply for jobs they were qualified for	82.9%
Care responsibilities and job design	Among those who declined to apply, hours/location were unmanageable given home responsibilities	44.1%
Expected rejection	Among those who declined to apply, did not think they would be selected	23.5%
Confidence despite qualification	Among those who declined to apply, lacked confidence despite being qualified	17.6%
Hiring treatment	Rated gender's role in hiring treatment 4–5 out of 5	53.7%
Networks and access	Biggest entry barrier was limited professional networks or connections	41.5%
Family pressure	Biggest entry barrier was family pressure or expectations	17.1%
Practical training gap	Biggest entry barrier was insufficient practical training	12.2%
Overt bias	Biggest entry barrier was overt gender bias from interviewers	12.2%
Retention cliff	Say women are most likely to leave tech after having children	61.0%
Early-career exit	Say women are most likely to leave in early career	19.5%
Personal exit risk	Have considered leaving the sector, including 9.8% who left	51.2%
Promotion barriers	Women personally known to respondents most often left because of no promotion opportunities	31.7%
Migration pull	Women personally known to respondents most often left because they moved abroad	24.4%
Pay gap	Report personally experiencing a pay gap	51.2%
Pay opacity	Do not know what male colleagues earn	26.8%
Weak accountability	Have a workplace discrimination-reporting mechanism but do not trust it, or have no mechanism at all	68.3%

Table 4. Problem diagnosis from quantified survey findings in Section IV. Some rows use subgroups, such as respondents who declined to apply or respondents describing women they know who left the sector.

How Women Would Fix It

The table below separates respondents' preferred solutions from their diagnosis of the problem. It includes the quantified government actions, workplace benefits, remote-work-law views, and startup-financing barriers reported in the findings section.

Solution area	Quantified preference or constraint	Result
Conditional fiscal incentives	Rated a conditional female-employment tax bonus 4–5 out of 5	61.0%
Untargeted fiscal incentives	Believe blanket tax breaks will benefit women without conditions	29.3%
Targeted hiring condition	Say tax breaks will help only if companies are required to hire more women	36.6%
Structural barriers remain	Say tax breaks will not help because structural and societal barriers remain	26.8%
Government action	Additional tax benefits for companies that provide childcare support	27.0%
Government action	Require companies to publicly report how many women they employ	22.0%
Government action	Earmarked funds for women-led startups	20.0%
Government action	Fund women’s coding bootcamps and ICT scholarships	17.0%
Government action	Stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination protections in hiring	15.0%
Workplace benefit	Flexible or remote work options	56.0%
Workplace benefit	Formal mentorship or sponsorship program	51.0%
Workplace benefit	Transparent salary scales	44.0%
Workplace benefit	Extended paid maternity leave	22.0%
Workplace benefit	Subsidized or onsite childcare	10.0%
Remote-work law	Say it will help women because flexibility is a major barrier	51.2%
Remote-work law	Say it will help only if it includes strong maternity leave protections	22.0%
Remote-work law	Say bigger barriers are in hiring, not flexibility	22.0%
Startup financing barrier	Among 24 venture-interested respondents: absence of government grants or seed funding for women entrepreneurs	9 of 24
Startup financing barrier	Among 24 venture-interested respondents: collateral requirements for bank loans	6 of 24
Startup financing barrier	Among 24 venture-interested respondents: complex regulatory registration	5 of 24
Startup financing barrier	Among 24 venture-interested respondents: male-dominated venture networks	4 of 24

Table 5. Respondents’ preferred fixes and implementation constraints, drawn from quantified findings in Section IV. Startup-financing rows use the subgroup of 24 respondents who had considered starting a tech venture.

V. Interview Evidence

The four interviews add mechanism to the survey's magnitudes — how the numbers are produced inside firms and classrooms.

The pipeline narrows early and stays narrow. The QC engineer, a 2024 IT graduate, counted roughly five women in her graduating class and described her university program as almost entirely male. The data specialist, who also teaches secondary school, traced the problem further back: female participation is already thin in grades 6–10, and schools “simply do not have enough computers.” Both the QC engineer and the written respondent converged on education-stage remedies — free or subsidized university IT education, better facilities and professional networking for women students, and bridging the gap between university curricula and industry demands.

Hiring runs on personal networks, which reproduces the existing workforce. The hiring manager — responsible for 60–70 staff — described a recruitment model built on hiring events, college outreach, and above all referrals from current employees, an approach he noted can “snowball.” He characterized the applicant pool as nearly gender-balanced and said the firm hires purely on merit; he also confirmed the company has never deliberately tried to recruit more women. In a workforce that is 92% male nationally, referral-driven hiring without corrective incentives mathematically reproduces the imbalance — and it corroborates the survey’s top-cited entry barrier, limited professional networks. The written respondent’s experience is the worker-side mirror: her transition into the sector was smooth only because she “relied on my own network,” with no support from her university.

Women who enter are routed toward representation rather than technical work. The data specialist described being viewed “as a person just filling the quota” rather than as a coder and observed that women are “always placed as a manager where you control the people, rather than being given the space to actually do the technical work” — always the “second person,” never the boss. The hiring manager’s account is consistent in substance if not in framing: he observed that women at his firm cluster in development and quality-control roles. The survey’s open responses echo to the same channeling (the engineering graduate who left because she never used her degree).

The retention cliff is real, and firms are not addressing its causes. The hiring manager independently confirmed the survey’s central attrition finding from the employer side: women at his firm tend to leave in their mid-30s as family responsibilities grow, or to go abroad. The firm’s retention strategy — a friendly culture and one-on-one conversations when someone considers leaving — does not touch the structural drivers. The QC engineer identified what is missing: workplaces do not take menstrual pain seriously, and maternity and sick leave are inadequate; “events that happen in women’s lives are not taken as seriously.”

Views split on whether fiscal incentives will work — along an instructive line. Asked whether tax benefits tied to female employment would genuinely change hiring, the written respondent — the interviewee with product and research experience closest to firm decision-making — answered “yes, most likely.” The data specialist was skeptical, on two grounds worth taking seriously: the

tax administration system as currently built does not deliver incentives effectively, and the deepest problem is societal — “the underlying logic that women are only meant for representation and marriage.” The hiring manager, characteristically, favored general sector investment and cultivation of foreign outsourcing relationships over gender-specific measures. These positions triangulate to the same design conclusion as Survey Finding 6: incentives can move firms, but only if they are administratively credible, conditional, and paired with structural measures (childcare, education access, enforcement) that tax policy alone cannot deliver.

VI. Comparative Context and Fiscal Precedents

Is this a Nepal problem or a technology problem?

Nepal's 7.88% female share of the ICT workforce is low by every available comparison. Thailand and the Philippines report women at approximately 42% of their technology workforces, India at about 34% of the IT sector, and Indonesia at about 22% of technology roles.²³ Nepal sits at less than a quarter of the nearest regional figure.

The gap is not explained by Nepal's general standing on gender. Nepal ranks 125th of 148 economies on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index and third within South Asia, ahead of Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives and Pakistan.²⁴ The region as a whole ranks seventh of eight, with the lowest Economic Participation and Opportunity score of any region at 40.6%.²⁵ Nor is the gap explained by Nepali employment norms: women hold 20.79% of positions in Nepal's provincial and federal government workforce — nearly three times their share of the technology sector. Nepal's technology industry underperforms its region, and it underperforms its own public sector.

The comparison points to a sector-specific failure, which makes the problem more amenable to policy. The underlying pattern is not unique to Nepal in kind, only in degree: globally, women hold 28.2% of STEM roles and 22% of AI roles, and while they constitute more than a third of STEM graduates, they hold just over 12% of STEM executive positions.²⁶ Nepal has no AI-workforce gender data at all.

Fiscal precedents

²³ WIIT, *Barriers to Breakthroughs*, 8. WIIT cites Boston Consulting Group (2020) for Indonesia and NASSCOM (2023) for India.

²⁴ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2025* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2025), 33, table 1.4, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2025/>.

²⁵ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2025*, 31.

²⁶ Andrea Willige, "Can AI Fix the Gender Gap in STEM?," *World Economic Forum*, March 26, 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/03/ai-stem-women-gender-gap/>; Gabriela Ramos, "Why We Must Act Now to Close the Digital Gender Gap in AI," *World Economic Forum*, August 22, 2022, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/08/why-we-must-act-now-to-close-the-gender-gap-in-ai/>.

Four Asian precedents address problems this memorandum's survey identified directly. Each is presented with its instruments, its measured outcomes, and its documented limitations, and each is developed further alongside the relevant recommendation.

Japan: conditionality attached to procurement

Japan adopted "womenomics" as a pillar of national growth strategy in 2013, on the analysis — originating with Goldman Sachs strategist Kathy Matsui — that closing the gender gap in labor force participation could raise GDP by 13 to 15%.²⁷ The instruments were fiscal before they were regulatory: paid leave was raised to replace two-thirds of earnings for the first six months, the ceiling on the dependent spouse tax deduction was raised from ¥1.03 million to ¥1.5 million, though the deduction framework itself was left in place, and government daycare capacity was expanded by 219,000 places by 2014.²⁸ This was followed in 2017 by a ¥2 trillion (approximately USD 17.6 billion) commitment to education and childcare, providing free preschool for all children aged three to five and for under-tuos in low-income households, explicitly tied to a target of raising the female employment rate from 68% to 73% by 2020.²⁹ The package was financed by a consumption tax increase alongside a ¥300 billion contribution from the corporate sector.

The regulatory instrument came in 2015. Under the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace, employers above a size threshold — initially 301 employees, since lowered to 101 effective April 2022 — must analyze gender disparities in recruitment, continuous employment, working hours and the share of women in management, set targets, and publish an action plan in a public database.³⁰ Compliance was near-total: 99.5% of firms with 301 or more employees had filed action plans by June 2017.³¹ Firms meeting the criteria receive Eruboshi certification, and from 2016 certified firms receive additional evaluation points in central government procurement scoring.³² Separate gender pay gap disclosure became mandatory for firms with 301 or more employees in July 2022, extending to firms with 101 or more in April 2026.

The measured results are substantial on participation. Female labor force participation reached 66% by 2016, surpassing the United States at 64%. Among women aged 30–34 — the

²⁷ "Spotlight on Japan," Council on Foreign Relations, Women's Participation in the Global Economy, <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-global-economy/case-studies/japan>.

²⁸ Jay Shambaugh, Ryan Nunn, and Becca Portman, "Lessons from the Rise of Women's Labor Force Participation in Japan," Brookings Institution, November 1, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/lessons-from-the-rise-of-womens-labor-force-participation-in-japan/>.

²⁹ Mark Crawford, "Abe's Womenomics Policy, 2013–2020: Tokenism, Gradualism, or Failed Strategy?," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 19, no. 4 (February 15, 2021), <https://apjif.org/2021/4/crawford>.

³⁰ Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, Gender Equality Policy in Japan (August 2017), 14, https://www.gender.go.jp/international/int_kaigi/int_acw3/pdf/contry_presentation_japan_09.pdf.

³¹ Gender Equality Bureau, Gender Equality Policy in Japan, 5.

³² Gender Equality Bureau, Gender Equality Policy in Japan, 15–16.

cohort Nepal loses — participation rose from just over 60% in 2006 to 80% by 2023.³³ Two indicators matter most for Nepal: the employment rate of women aged 25–44 raising children rose from 67.8% in 2012 to 72.7% in 2016, and the proportion of women continuing to work after their first childbirth rose from 38.0% in 2011 to 53.1% in 2016.³⁴

The results on seniority are not substantial. Japan's target of 30% of leadership positions by 2020 was scaled back; the gender wage gap has barely moved; and employment gains concentrated in non-regular, lower-paid and less secure work.³⁵ Independent assessment finds the certification regime's impact modest, noting that it remains voluntary, that sanctions extend only to guidance rather than financial penalty, and that measurable change has been confined largely to non-executive board appointments.³⁶

South Korea: support through superordinate law

Korea legislated rather than incentivized. The Act on Fostering and Supporting Women Scientists and Technicians, enacted in 2002, is the superordinate law for all Korean policy on women in STEM, and it established WISET — the Korea Foundation for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology — as a publicly funded standing institution, with five-year master plans set since 2004.³⁷

The Act's instruments operate on three margins. An affirmative action system sets recruitment, employment, promotion and position targets, and institutions must designate an officer responsible for women in STEM.³⁸ Mentoring is structured rather than voluntary: mentor teams of three or more women working in science and engineering institutions run company visits, mock interviews and skills sessions for female undergraduates and graduate students.³⁹ And the R&D Career Re-Entry Program addresses the childbirth cliff directly by paying research institutes to hire women whose careers were interrupted⁴⁰ — KRW 21 million annually for a researcher with a master's degree and KRW 23 million for a PhD, for up to three years, alongside mentoring and job-matching.⁴¹

³³ Mary C. Brinton, "Unlocking the Potential of Japan's Female Workforce," East Asia Forum, July 7, 2024, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/07/07/unlocking-the-potential-of-japans-female-workforce/>.

³⁴ Gender Equality Bureau, *Gender Equality Policy in Japan*.

³⁵ Crawford, "Abe's Womenomics Policy."

³⁶ Institute for Social Value Design, "The Gender Wage Gap in International Comparison: Three Institutional Designs and the 134-Country Child Penalty Atlas," June 2026, <https://isvd.or.jp/en/columns/gender-wage-gap-intl-comparison>.

³⁷ Korea Foundation for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, "President's Message," accessed July 2026, https://www.wiset.or.kr/eng/sub01_03.do.

³⁸ Korea Foundation for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, accessed July 2026, <https://www.wiset.or.kr/eng/>.

³⁹ Korea Foundation for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, "Mentoring for Women in STEM," accessed July 2026, https://www.wiset.or.kr/eng/sub03_01_02.do.

⁴⁰ Korea Foundation for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, "R&D Career Re-Entry Program," accessed July 2026, https://www.wiset.or.kr/eng/sub03_02_01.do.

⁴¹ Korea Foundation for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, "R&D Career Re-Entry Program," accessed July 2026, https://www.wiset.or.kr/eng/sub03_02_01.do.

Critically for Nepal, Article 6 of the same Act mandates a statutory national survey of employment and working conditions for women in STEM, covering approximately 5,000 universities, public research institutes and private research institutes with more than 100 employees, with microdata publicly downloadable.⁴² The policy created the dataset that measures the policy.

That dataset records the outcome. Women's share of Korea's STEM workforce rose from 22.7% in 2014 to 26.8% in 2017, 28.1% in 2020, and 31.6% in 2023 — a rise of roughly nine percentage points over a decade.⁴³ The limitation is the same as Japan's: women held only 9.1% of senior and managerial STEM positions in 2023, up from 4.9% in 2014 but essentially flat since 2017.⁴⁴ The childbirth cliff also persists — for natural science and engineering graduates after age 30, male labor force participation remains near 90% while female participation falls to around 60%, with roughly 180,000 career-interrupted women recorded in 2022.⁴⁵

Bangladesh: training volume and the placement gap

The World Bank-financed Leveraging ICT for Growth, Employment and Governance project set a 30% female participation requirement in its training programs and trained 10,450 women against a target of 9,000, contributing to a rise in women's share of IT/ITES employment from 5% to 20%.⁴⁶

The government's *She Power* project, approved in 2017, trained 25,125 women across 130 upazilas in 43 districts in call center operations, e-commerce, IT services, graphic design, web development and digital marketing, structured as five months of intensive training followed by one month of mentorship for job placement, with completion incentives including a laptop.⁴⁷ Current World Bank programming is training 24,000 female students in public universities in emerging technologies while incentivizing companies and universities to maintain at least 30% women in technology training programs.⁴⁸

⁴² Korea Foundation for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, "Workforce Statistics on Women in STEM," accessed July 2026, https://www.wiset.or.kr/eng/sub02_02.do.

⁴³ WISET, "Workforce Statistics on Women in STEM."

⁴⁴ WISET, "Workforce Statistics on Women in STEM."

⁴⁵ Aree Moon, Eunsung Oh, and Seyun Ji, "Empowering Female STEM Talent for STI: Policy Implementation and Implications," Science-Policy Brief for the Multistakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (May 2024), <https://sdgs.un.org/documents/moon-oh-e-and-ji-s-empowering-female-stem-talent-sti-policy-implementation-and->

⁴⁶ World Bank, Bangladesh: Leveraging ICT for Growth, Employment and Governance Project (P122201), Implementation Completion and Results Report (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2019), <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/473211578064821790/txt/Bangladesh-Leveraging-ICT-for-Growth-Employment-and-Governance-Project.txt>.

⁴⁷ "Training Started for the 'Her Power' Trainers; 25,125 Women Will Get Training across the Country," Digi Bangla, October 2023, <https://digibanglatech.news/english/113708/>.

⁴⁸ Hana Brix, Mary Porter Peschka, and Christine Zhenwei Qiang, "She Can Too: Upskilling Girls Today for the Digital Jobs of Tomorrow," World Bank Blogs, April 26, 2023, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/digital-development/she-can-too-upskilling-girls-today-digital-jobs-tomorrow>.

The instructive figure is She Power's ratio. Roughly 25,000 women trained produced approximately 3,000 entering work as freelancers⁴⁹ — which indicates that training volume alone does not resolve an employment bottleneck, and that the mentorship-and-placement component is the operative variable rather than the training itself.

Sri Lanka: employer commitments without statute

Sri Lanka's approach required no legislation. SheWorks Sri Lanka, launched in March 2018 as a private sector partnership under the IFC–Australian government Women in Work program, operated as a peer-learning platform in which participating employers made public commitments across six areas: women's business leadership, recruitment and retention of female talent, employer-supported childcare, anti-sexual harassment mechanisms, support for women in the value chain, and company leadership accountability.⁵⁰ Participating companies implemented 97 gender-smart actions, and the partnership created or retained 12,000 jobs for women.⁵¹

The program was underpinned by a business case rather than a compliance argument. IFC's accompanying study surveyed more than 1,600 employees across nine Sri Lankan companies and found that three in five had experienced some form of workplace violence or harassment, and nearly one in five felt unsafe at work — costing six working days per employee annually and at least USD 1.7 million across the nine firms surveyed.⁵²

What the four precedents share is that none of them requires new money at scale — in every case, the instrument was existing public money or existing public attention, and the innovation was the condition attached to it. They also share a limitation. Each moved participation and none moved seniority — Japan's leadership target was scaled back and its gains concentrated in non-regular work, Korea's share of senior STEM positions has sat near 9% since 2017, and Bangladesh's She Power trained roughly 25,000 women and produced roughly 3,000 placements. Conditions written at the entry margin produce results at the entry margin. Three principles follow for Nepal: attach conditions to instruments the budget has already funded rather than proposing instruments it cannot afford; write those conditions above entry level, at retention and promotion, where all four precedents fell short; and mandate the disaggregated reporting that makes any of it verifiable — because Nepal's female workforce share is known only from an NGO survey of 402 firms, while the industry association overseeing a fivefold expansion holds no gender breakdown of its own.

⁴⁹ Digi Bangla, "Training Started for the 'Her Power' Trainers."

⁵⁰ "IFC and Australian Government Help Create and Retain Jobs for 12,000 Women in Sri Lanka," International Finance Corporation, 2020, <https://www.ifc.org/en/pressroom/2020/ifc-and-australian-government-help-create-and-retain-jobs-for-12000-women-in-sri-lanka>.

⁵¹ IFC, "IFC and Australian Government Help Create and Retain Jobs for 12,000 Women in Sri Lanka."

⁵² International Finance Corporation, *The Business Case for Creating Respectful Workplaces in Sri Lanka* (Washington, DC: International Finance Corporation, 2022).

VII. Recommendations

The recommendations below attach to instruments described in Section II. None requires a new appropriation, and none removes a benefit any firm currently holds: the government measures work either through forgone revenue on spending a firm chooses to undertake, or through conditions on the government's own procurement and program funding rather than on private employers. This follows the pattern in Section VI, where the measurable results in Japan and Korea came from reducing the cost to firms of retaining women rather than from penalties for not doing so.

Two of the budget's technology commitments do not yet have operating rules. Allocation criteria for the Sovereign AI Compute Center are not set out in the published budget, and the remote work legal framework is scheduled for drafting in the third quarter of FY 2083/84. Provisions written into an instrument at the drafting stage require no amendment later.

The recommendations are grouped in three categories, corresponding to what each type of actor can act on. Fiscal instruments reach childcare provision, the terms of publicly funded training, and the content of a framework the government is drafting. They do not reach the composition of a hiring manager's professional network. That limit is narrower than it appears: the survey's largest finding (Finding 2) corresponds to two structural conditions rather than only to individual confidence, since networks were the top-cited entry barrier (Finding 1) and the hiring manager interviewed described recruitment running primarily through employee referrals. Job posting practice and recruitment channels are within firms' control, which is what the second category addresses. The third lists professional networks currently operating in Nepal as general resources for women.

A. Fiscal Policy Recommendations For Government

Recommendation 1: Make childcare deductible and enforce the maternity leave that already exists

The problem. Childbirth is the exit point. 25 of 41 respondents named having children as the moment women are most likely to leave the sector, and 15 of the 34 who declined to apply for jobs they were qualified for cited hours or location they could not reconcile with home responsibilities. Childcare was the single most requested government action at 27%. The national picture matches: only 18% of formal-sector women have access to a place to breastfeed, 2.3% have access to childcare at work, and 31% receive a lactation break — all benefits mandated by law.⁵³ The protection meant to prevent this already exists and is ignored — the Labor Act (2017) grants

⁵³ Loli Arribas-Banos, Jenn Yablonski, Himanshi Jain, and Lauren Ashley Whitehead, "Leaving No Parent Behind: Lessons from Family Friendly Policies in Nepal," World Bank Blogs, March 7, 2025, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/investinpeople/Leaving-no-parent-behind-Lessons-from-family-friendly-policies-in-Nepal>. Figures from a June 2023 survey of 1,000 employed individuals across urban Nepal.

98 days of maternity leave, of which 60 are fully paid,⁵⁴ yet only 5.9% of firms provide the full 98 days and 25.7% grant fewer than 45.⁵⁵ The FY 2083/84 budget contains no childcare allocation in any technology line.

Implementation. Three limbs, none of which penalizes a firm. First, a payroll super-deduction: employer spending on childcare provision or stipends is deductible above 100% of cost, making it cheaper for a firm to offer childcare than not to. Second, enforcement before expansion — the Department of Labor audits maternity leave compliance among firms claiming the IT export exemption, since a firm receiving public money should meet the statutory floor. Third, a re-entry track funded from the NPR 2.27 billion Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens allocation, paying firms a fixed subsidy to hire technically qualified women whose careers were interrupted.

Precedent. Japan committed ¥2 trillion (~USD 17.6 billion) to childcare and early education alongside its tax measures.⁵⁶ The relevant results are narrow and specific: the employment rate of women aged 25–44 raising children rose from 67.8% (2012) to 72.7% (2016), and the share of women continuing to work after a first birth rose from 38.0% (2011) to 53.1% (2016).⁵⁷ Korea's R&D Career Re-Entry Programme funds research institutes to hire career-interrupted women — KRW 21 million annually for a master's-qualified researcher, KRW 23 million for a PhD, for up to three years, with mentoring and job-matching attached.⁵⁸

Recommendation 2: Write worker protection into the remote work framework before it is drafted

The problem. Flexible or remote work was the most requested workplace benefit in the survey, at 23 of 41. But respondents were explicit that flexibility without protection relocates the insecurity rather than removing it — 22% said remote work helps women only if it carries maternity protection, and 22% said hiring, not location, is the actual barrier. The written interview respondent expected benefit but could not say how much, noting it "depends on many factors." Where benefits are administered by firms rather than monitored centrally, compliance gaps are the documented result, and a framework that expands remote employment without written protections expands the hardest category of work to monitor.⁵⁹

Implementation. This is the cheapest recommendation in the memorandum because the instrument does not yet exist. The remote work legal framework is targeted for Q3 FY 2083/84

⁵⁴ Labour Act, 2074 (2017), sec. 45(1), (3) (Nepal).

⁵⁵ WIIT, Barriers to Breakthroughs, 12; see also table 8, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, "Abenomics and the Japanese Economy," March 23, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/abenomics-and-japanese-economy>.

⁵⁷ Gender Equality Bureau, Gender Equality Policy in Japan, 5.

⁵⁸ Korea Foundation for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, "R&D Career Re-Entry Program," accessed July 2026, https://www.wiset.or.kr/eng/sub03_02_01.do.

⁵⁹ Arribas-Banos et al., "Leaving No Parent Behind."

(January–March 2027).⁶⁰ Contracts executed under it should be required to carry written maternity leave terms, minimum notice and contract security provisions, and equal-pay-for-equal-work language. Drafting these into the framework costs nothing; adding them after firms have built hiring practices around the framework is a renegotiation.

Precedent. Japan's Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace (2015), described in Section VI, requires covered employers to analyze and publish gender disparities in working hours specifically — establishing working conditions, not just headcount, as a reportable dimension.^{61,62}

Recommendation 3: Attach a participation floor to publicly funded training, and pay providers for placement

The problem. The binding constraint lies after training, not inside the education pipeline. 11,078 women were studying computing by 2021, and women are 13.55% of registered ICT engineers, against 7.88% of the workforce. Women are being trained and not hired. The single largest entry barrier (Finding 1) was the absence of a professional network, and 21 of 41 chose mentorship or sponsorship as the benefit that would most have changed their careers. The hiring manager's referral-driven recruitment model, described in Section V, filters out women without networks before assessment even begins.

Implementation. Any training program financed from the NPR 4 billion science, technology and innovation allocation, the 1% capital expenditure floor, or the NPR 500 million Nepal Enterprise Facility reserves 30% of places for women⁶³. Critically, provider payment is structured so the final tranche is released on six-month job placement rather than course completion, and each program includes a structured mentorship and employer-matching component. This constrains ministry procurement, not private firms.

Precedent. Bangladesh set exactly this 30% floor in its World Bank-financed LICT program — and the outcome is the argument for the payment structure. That program trained 10,450 women against a target of 9,000.⁶⁴ Training volume alone does not clear an employment bottleneck: the government's subsequent She Power project (Section VI) added a dedicated mentorship-and-placement component to training, precisely the payment-structure logic this

⁶⁰ TechSansar, "Nepal Budget 2083/84."

⁶¹ Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, Gender Equality Policy in Japan (August 2017), 14, https://www.gender.go.jp/international/int_kaigi/int_acw3/pdf/contry_presentation_japan_09.pdf.

⁶² Gender Equality Bureau, Gender Equality Policy in Japan, 5.

⁶³ TechSansar, "Nepal Budget 2083/84," clauses 28 and 57.

⁶⁴ World Bank, Bangladesh: Leveraging ICT for Growth, Employment and Governance Project (P122201).

recommendation applies.⁶⁵ Korea's WISSET mentoring model, also described in Section VI, operates at comparable scale.⁶⁶

B. Industry Standard Recommendations for the Technology Sector

These are voluntary standards, adoptable without legislation, and each is justified by cost as much as by equity.

Recommendation 1: Publish salary bands, working hours and precise role requirements on every posting

The problem. This answers the largest finding in the survey. 34 of 41 respondents — 82.9% — have declined to apply for a job they were qualified for. Vague postings let qualified candidates disqualify themselves; precise ones do not. The pay picture compounds it: 21 of 41 report having personally experienced a pay gap and 11 of 41 do not know what male colleagues earn, meaning half the sample perceives a disparity that a quarter has no means of verifying. This sits against WIIT's finding that 87.9% of women report no compensation difference⁶⁷ — a contradiction that transparency would resolve in either direction. The data specialist interviewed drew the distinction that may explain it: parity may hold in technical roles but not in technology management.

Implementation. No cost beyond rewriting job templates. Post the band, the actual working-hour expectation, and the specific requirements — then interview against them.

Precedent. Japan made gender pay gap disclosure mandatory for firms with 301 or more employees in July 2022, extending to firms with 101 or more in April 2026.⁶⁸ Regional practice is moving toward disclosure; Nepali firms adopting it voluntarily arrive ahead of it.

Recommendation 2: Recruit beyond referral networks

The problem. The hiring manager reported that his firm's applicant pool is close to gender-balanced and that women candidates are equally competitive — while also reporting that the firm has never deliberately recruited women and hires largely through employee referrals. Both statements can be true, and together they describe the mechanism: a referral pipeline reproduces

⁶⁵ Digi Bangla, "Training Started for the 'Her Power' Trainers."

⁶⁶ Korea Foundation for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, "STEM Research Team Projects," accessed July 2026, https://www.wiset.or.kr/eng/sub03_01_01.do.

⁶⁷ WIIT, Barriers to Breakthroughs, 14; see also iv.

⁶⁸ Orrick, "Japan Employment Law Alert: Expansion of the Scope of Mandatory Disclosure of Gender Pay Gap and Other Information," July 2026, <https://www.orrick.com/en/Insights/2026/07/Japan-Employment-Law-Alert-Expansion-of-the-Scope-of-Mandatory-Disclosure-of-Gender-Pay-Gap>.

the composition of the existing workforce, which in a 7.88% female sector reproduces 7.88%.⁶⁹ The data specialist described the second-order version — being read as "filling the quota" rather than as a technical hire, and being routed toward managing people rather than doing technical work.

Implementation. Post openly and assess against published criteria; structure interviews so evaluation is against the requirements rather than the referrer; track applicant-to-hire conversion by gender at each stage, which is the diagnostic the hiring manager did not have when asked whether women drop out at particular stages.

Precedent. Under Japan's 2015 Act, recruitment and continuous employment are two of the four categories firms must analyze and set targets against. The analysis itself is the intervention, and it is available to Nepali firms voluntarily.

Recommendation 3: Build reliable reporting mechanisms

The problem. 28 of 41 respondents have no discrimination-reporting mechanism they trust — the second-largest finding in the survey, and notable because roughly half of those women work somewhere that has a mechanism. The missing element is trust. WIIT finds only 12.4% of companies have comprehensive policies supporting inclusiveness.⁷⁰ The QC engineer's account describes the everyday version: workplaces do not take menstrual pain seriously, and "events that happen in women's lives are not taken as seriously."

Implementation. A named officer outside the reporting line, published resolution timelines, annual publication of case counts and outcomes without identifying details, and prevention training for managers. Sector-level commitments published together, so firms are visible to each other rather than only to a regulator.

Precedent. SheWorks Sri Lanka's employer commitments included anti-harassment mechanisms and leadership accountability as two of its six areas (Section VI). The IFC business case for this recommendation is direct: three in five surveyed employees had experienced workplace violence or harassment, costing at least USD 1.7 million across the nine firms surveyed.

C. Resources for Women in Nepal's Technology Sector

The first two categories address what government funds and what firms control. Neither reaches the decision a qualified woman makes before an employer ever sees her name — and that decision is where this survey's largest single finding sits.

⁶⁹ WIIT, *Barriers to Breakthroughs*, 8.

⁷⁰ WIIT, *Barriers to Breakthroughs*, iv.

This category does not shift responsibility onto individual women. The 34 of 41 respondents who declined to apply for jobs they were qualified for gave reasons that split almost evenly between two causes with different owners: 15 cited hours or location they could not reconcile with home responsibilities, which Recommendation A1 addresses, and 14 cited expected rejection or lack of confidence despite being qualified, which is downstream of vague job postings and referral-driven hiring — the subject of B1 and B2. Self-selection is a two-sided problem. The recommendations below cover the side the other two categories cannot reach, and each is paired with the employer-side measure that makes it effective.

Recommendation 1: Apply anyway and hold employers to postings that can be assessed

The problem. This recommendation addresses the self-selection finding described above. The consequence is visible in the interview evidence: the hiring manager responsible for 60–70 staff described his applicant pool as nearly gender-balanced and women candidates as equally competitive. He was describing the pool that remains after self-selection has already occurred. A sector that observes parity at the application stage has no reason to believe it has a hiring problem.

What this means in practice. Applying changes the data the sector sees. An applicant pool that reflects the 13.55% of registered ICT engineers who are women, rather than the pool that survives self-selection, is the first piece of evidence a firm has that its 7.88% is a choice rather than a supply constraint.

The shared burden. This works only if postings are written to be assessed against. Vague requirements turn applying into a guess; specific requirements let applicants make a judgment.

Recommendation 2: Build the network deliberately

The problem. Limited professional networks was the single most-cited entry barrier at 17 of 41, and 21 of 41 chose formal mentorship or sponsorship as the benefit that would most have changed their careers. The mechanism is documented in the interviews: the hiring manager's referral-driven recruitment model (Section V) reproduces this pattern from the employer side. The written respondent's account is the same mechanism seen from the worker's side — her transition into the sector was smooth only because she relied on her own network, with no support from her university.

What this means in practice. In a referral-based market, a professional network is not a career accessory; it is the hiring channel. Joining and sustaining the women's technology communities already operating in Nepal — communities that trade referrals, mentorship, and salary information — builds the channel that referral hiring otherwise closes.

The shared burden. Peer networks cannot substitute for a funded program. Korea's WISET runs structured mentoring as a public institution rather than a voluntary association, which is the model for a state-backed program in Nepal; Bangladesh's She Power attached a dedicated

mentorship-and-placement component to funded training rather than leaving networking to participants. Recommendation A3 places that component inside publicly funded training.

Existing organizations

A note on how this list was assembled: these communities were identified while recruiting respondents for this memorandum's survey. That they were located by an outside researcher within weeks, while 17 of 41 respondents named the absence of professional networks as their principal entry barrier, indicates a distribution problem rather than an absence of provision. The networks exist; they are not reaching the women who most need them.

Women in Information Technology (WIIT) — <https://wiit.org.np/>

Founded in 2019 by women working in Nepal's ICT sector, WIIT is a non-profit focused on advancing women in technology from education through leadership, and is the author of *Barriers to Breakthroughs*, the sector's principal gender dataset.⁷¹ Membership is open by application form. WIIT also convenes the sector: its 2023 recognition program for women in information technology drew the Minister for Communication and Information Technology as chief guest and a sitting member of parliament as keynote speaker.⁷²

Women Leaders in Technology (WLIT) — <https://www.wlit.org/>

WLIT runs the most structured pipeline program in the country: a fellowship for university-level women in computing beginning with a technical and leadership bootcamp and continuing through monthly meetups, mentorship, and internship placement. Fifteen participants are selected annually by open call, with full and partial scholarships available, and the program now runs in Kathmandu and Pokhara. The organization reports more than 200 active alumni working across technology. Its origins are directly relevant to this memorandum's findings: the founding group formed after realizing they were consistently the only women at hackathons, and concluded the cause was absent mentorship rather than absent skill.⁷³

Nepali Women+ in Computing (NWiC) — <https://nepaliwic.org/>

Founded in November 2019 as an AnitaB.org Systems Affinity Group, NWiC is a volunteer-run global community of Nepali technologists, which makes it accessible to women who have left the country as well as those working in Nepal — relevant given that 24.4% of respondents

⁷¹ "About Women in Information Technology," WIIT, <https://wiit.org.np/>.

⁷² "WIIT to Honour 101 Women in Info-Tech," *Kathmandu Post*, March 7, 2023, <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2023/03/07/wiit-to-honour-101-women-in-info-tech>.

⁷³ "About WLIT," Women Leaders in Technology, <https://www.wlit.org/about/overview>.

identified moving abroad as a reason women they know left the sector. It runs a monthly discussion series, a profile series documenting women working in Nepali technology, and a Lean In circle.⁷⁴

Women in Data (WID) — <https://womenindatanepal.org/>

A networking platform for women in data, technology and innovation, governed by a steering committee that includes WLiT, WIIT, Open Knowledge Nepal, Shequal Foundation, Robotics Association of Nepal, Digital Rights Nepal, Udeshya Girls in STEM, Smart Cheli, NAXA and Logpoint, with the Asia Foundation's Data for Development program in an advisory role. Two features answer the survey's findings directly: a "Find Talent" directory that lets employers search women professionals rather than relying on referrals, and an annual conference held in Kathmandu.⁷⁵

Women Techmakers Kathmandu — <https://www.facebook.com/wtmkathmandu>

A Google-initiated community chapter supporting women's participation in technology, run locally alongside Google Developer Group Kathmandu.⁷⁶ Lower-commitment than a fellowship, and useful for event-based networking.

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⁷⁴ "About," Nepali Women+ in Computing, <https://nepaliwic.org/about/>; "Awards," Nepali Women+ in Computing, <https://nepaliwic.org/awards/>.

⁷⁵ About WID, "Women in Data, <https://womenindatanepal.org/about>.

⁷⁶ "Women Techmakers Kathmandu," Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/wtmkathmandu>.

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