YOUTH AI SURVEY 2026

WORK, STUDY & LEISURE IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

NEPAL

COUNTRY POLICY BRIEF

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This policy brief presents country-specific findings from the Youth AI Survey 2026, a multi-country study examining how young people aged 18-35 use, experience, and think about artificial intelligence. Conducted globally by Restless Development, the University of Cambridge Centre for Human-Inspired Artificial Intelligence, and Makerere University, the survey collected 1,864 responses from young people, primarily in Africa and South Asia, with the United Kingdom serving as a high-income country comparator.

This brief is intended for national governments, in-country NGO partners, international funders, technology companies, and youth organisations working in Nepal. It draws on country-level data to surface actionable findings and recommendations within the Nepal context.

Lead author: Restless Development (Nepal)

Research partners: University of Cambridge Centre for Human-Inspired Artificial Intelligence · Makerere University

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1. INTRODUCTION & COUNTRY CONTEXT

Country Context

Nepal's economy relies heavily on traditional sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and remittance inflows, but a pivot toward the digital economy is underway. Driven by a young demographic, roughly 40% of the population is under 30, demand for connected services is growing rapidly. The internet penetration rate reached 56.0% at the close of 2025, with 16.6 million active internet users (DataReportal, 2026). Access is sharply uneven: the Kathmandu Valley reports penetration above 79%, compared with roughly 14% in Karnali Province, and fixed broadband costs consume around 7% of average per capita income, more than three times the international affordability benchmark (Chand, 2026). The export-oriented IT sector has become a significant economic pillar: the most recent comprehensive study, by the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS) in 2022, put Nepal's IT service exports at $515 million, a 64.2% increase on the previous year; industry estimates put the 2026 figure closer to $900 million-$1 billion, though this has not yet been confirmed by a formal survey (NAS-IT, cited in Chand, 2026).

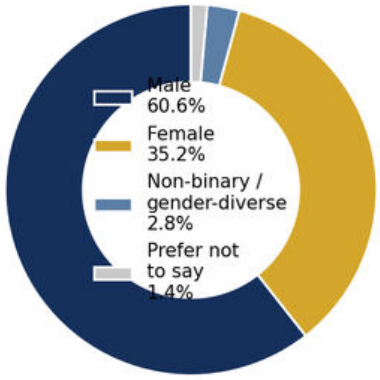
Nepal's AI landscape is moving from passive observation to active national integration. In August 2025, the Cabinet approved the country's first comprehensive National AI Policy (2082), setting out plans for a National AI Centre, an AI Regulation Council, AI Centres of Excellence in every province, and stronger data-protection law. The private sector in urban hubs has begun adopting AI for algorithmic automation, predictive analytics, and customer-service chatbots. Microsoft's AI Economy Institute, which tracks generative AI adoption through anonymised telemetry, does not publish a Nepal-specific adoption rate in its public reporting; its underlying technical analysis does, however, flag Nepal, alongside Sri Lanka, Peru, Pakistan and Panama, as ranking exceptionally high in AI-related search interest relative to measured usage, suggesting appetite for AI outstrips current access (Misra et al., 2025). Young people primarily use global consumer tools such as ChatGPT, alongside pervasive social platforms including Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, which remain major drivers of local internet consumption.

Investigating Nepal's digital and AI landscape is vital for several structural reasons. First, it addresses severe data gaps regarding the effects of emerging technologies on developing nations. Second, it helps target infrastructure investment where it is needed most, particularly given the scale of the access gap documented above.

2. ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

The Nepal sample comprised 71 respondents aged between 18 and 35. The largest share of respondents is in the 24-29 age group (50.0%), followed by the 30-35 age group (30.0%) and the 18-23 age group (20.0%) (n=70; age was not recorded for one respondent). The gender distribution of respondents shows that the majority are male (60.6%), followed by female (35.2%) and non-binary or gender-diverse (2.8%); 1 respondent (1.4%) did not disclose their gender.

Gender of Nepal Respondents (n=71)



Respondents are overwhelmingly urban: 70.4% live in urban areas, 16.9% in rural areas, and 11.3% in peri-urban areas. As with the wider survey, this urban skew reflects easier access to the internet and digital tools and means the findings below are most representative of connected, urban and peri-urban youth; Nepal's rural sample (n=12) is too small to support firm conclusions on its own. The sample is highly educated: 74.7% hold a bachelor's degree or higher (42.3% bachelor's, 32.4% postgraduate), with a further 19.7% having completed high school. Respondents' activities overlap, many combine several, but 35.2% are in full-time employment, 31.0% are students, 26.8% are seeking work, 15.5% volunteer, 12.7% are self-employed or freelance, 9.9% work part-time, and 4.2% are informal workers. Only one respondent (1.4%) identified as living with a disability, too small a subsample for separate analysis.

71% Total respondents	**35%** Females	**70%** Urban dwellers
50% Aged 24-29 (largest group)	**75%** Bachelor's degree or above	**80%** Currently studying or employed

3. HOW YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEPAL USE AI

81.7%
of Nepal respondents use AI daily

11-COUNTRY BENCHMARK
11-country survey average: 64%

Youth in Nepal engage with AI at a markedly higher rate than the 11-country average, primarily to learn new skills and for creative tasks such as writing, coding, and image generation. Engagement is strong across urban, peri-urban and rural respondents alike, Nepal's rural sample (n=12) does not show the adoption lag seen elsewhere in the survey, though it should be read cautiously given its small size.

Key Findings: AI Use Patterns

CORE METRICS SUMMARY

Metric	Nepal Figure	11-Country Benchmark	Status vs. Benchmark
Daily AI Usage Frequency	81.7%	64.0%	Significantly higher
Primary Use: Learning New Skills	81.7%	~70.0%	Higher than average
AI Use for Earning Income	14.1%	14.0%	In line with average
Never Used AI: Rural vs. Urban	8.3%		Rural: 8.3% never used; Urban/peri-urban: 0%

- **Primary use:** Learning new skills is the most common AI use in Nepal at 81.7%, well above the 11-country pattern (an average of roughly 70%, based on 75% of males and 66% of females reporting this use). Creative uses, writing, coding and image-generation, are similarly high, at 76.1%.
- **Income gap:** Despite widespread engagement, only 14.1% of Nepal respondents report earning income directly through AI, essentially in line with the 14% survey average. The gap between very high learning/productivity use and direct income generation remains large within Nepal itself.
- **Rural lag:** Unlike the wider 11-country pattern, Nepal's small rural sample (n=12) does not show a broad rural adoption lag: 83.3% of rural respondents use AI to learn new skills, comparable to 82.0% of urban respondents. The one clear rural gap is in never having used AI at all, 8.3% of rural respondents, versus 0% in urban and peri-urban areas. Given the small rural sample, this should be read as indicative rather than conclusive.
- **Gender gap:** Nepal's largest gender gaps run in the opposite direction to most surveyed countries: young females report using AI for academic support far more than young males (80.0% vs 39.5%, a 40.5-point gap) and for finding work more than males (56.0% vs 34.9%). Males report marginally higher use only for learning new skills and earning income. Nepal's gender gap in self-reported AI knowledge is also comparatively narrow, 34.9% of males report 'a lot' of knowledge versus 28.0% of females (6.9 points), well below the 11-country gap of 15 points (38% vs 23%).

"As someone working in the public health and development sector, I see great potential for AI to improve access to knowledge, strengthen research capacity, and support better decision-making. AI tools can help analyze large health datasets, support evidence-based policymaking, and improve communication of complex information.At the same time, it is important to ensure that AI development remains ethical, inclusive, and accessible to people in low- and middle-income countries. I hope that future AI innovations will prioritize equity, cultural diversity, and local context so that communities around the world can benefit from these technologies. Personally, I am interested in continuing to learn how AI can support public health research, program design, and knowledge sharing in global health.."

27-YEAR-OLD FEMALE FROM PERI-URBAN SEEKING WORK

4. WHO BENEFITS, WHO DOESN'T?

Barriers to AI Access

As per the survey, the leading barriers to accessing AI in Nepal are high data costs (43.7%) and fear of scams (39.4%), followed by weak connectivity and low digital skills (22.5% each). Unlike Nigeria and Angola, where connectivity is the dominant constraint, and unlike the UK, where the barrier is almost entirely ethical, Nepal shows a more even spread across cost, trust and skills.

44%	23%	23%
cite high data costs as a barrier	cite weak connectivity	cite low digital skills

These barriers compound Nepal's wider connectivity gap: fixed broadband costs consume around 7% of average per-capita income, more than three times the international affordability benchmark, and internet penetration ranges from over 79% in Kathmandu Valley to around 14% in Karnali Province (Chand, 2026). Fear of scams (39.4%) sits close behind data costs as a barrier, a concern not captured in the three headline figures above but present in nearly two in five responses, suggesting that trust and safety, not just affordability, shape whether young Nepalis engage with AI at all.

Gender Gaps in AI Knowledge & Economic Impact

6.9pp	11-COUNTRY BENCHMARK
gender gap in self-reported AI expertise ('a lot' of knowledge: males vs females)	Survey average: 38% of males vs 23% of females report 'a lot' of AI knowledge

Nepal's gender gap in self-reported AI expertise (6.9 percentage points, 34.9% of males and 28.0% of females report 'a lot' of knowledge) is notably narrower than the 11-country average of 15 points. Concern levels tell a different story: Nepali females report substantially higher concern than males across every domain measured; data ownership (88.0% of females vs 57.5% of males 'a lot' concerned), the power of AI companies (84.0% vs 50.0%), environmental impact (80.0% vs 38.1%), working conditions for AI data workers (69.6% vs 29.3%) and mental health (44.0% vs 21.4%).

These are among the widest female-dominant concern gaps recorded anywhere in the 11-country survey, placing Nepal alongside the UK, India and Zimbabwe in this pattern rather than showing the bimodal split seen in Angola. On income and employment, the research finds that Nepali females are considerably more likely than males to report AI having a high impact on their income and employment opportunities (47% of females vs 25% of males), while males are more likely to report low or no impact (42% vs 6%), the reverse of the pattern in India and Tanzania, where males report the larger impact. On language, 98.6% of respondents currently use AI in English and just 25.4% in Nepali (some use both English and Nepali), yet when asked what they would like, demand for Nepali support rises to 36.6%. Qualitatively, 62.9% of respondents feel AI tools reflect their language, culture or context to some degree, while 37.1% do not; those who said no most often pointed to a lack of Nepali-language support and a Western-centric training data bias, while several who said yes still qualified their answer, noting that representation depends heavily on how a prompt is phrased.

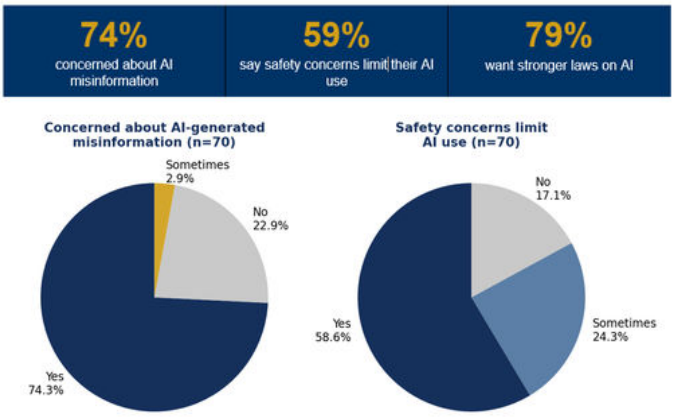
> *I hope no person on this earth should be unemployed due to Ai. No organism should go extinct due to the climate change that is the cause of excessive use of AI.*
>
> **18-YEAR-OLD FEMALE, HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION**

5. YOUNG PEOPLE'S AI CONCERNS

Across the full 11-country dataset, daily AI users are the most concerned about AI risks, not the least. Daily users express the highest concern across all five domains, with the largest gap in data ownership (58% of daily users express high concern vs 37% of non-users- a 21-percentage point gap). In Nepal, this pattern runs in reverse: respondents who use AI less than daily report higher 'a lot' concern than daily users across all five domains, for example 75.0% of non-daily users vs 67.9% of daily users on data ownership, and 76.9% vs 50.9% on environmental impact. This should be read cautiously, since the non-daily comparison group is small (n=12-13), but it is a genuine departure from the wider 11-country pattern and worth further investigation as the sample grows.

Data ownership is Nepal's leading concern (69.1% 'a lot' concerned), followed by the power of AI companies (64.3%), environmental impact (55.7%), working conditions for AI data workers (43.3%) and mental health and wellbeing (30.0%, the lowest of the five). The gender pattern is clearly female-dominant, placing Nepal alongside the UK, India and Zimbabwe rather than the male-dominant pattern seen in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanzania: females report higher 'a lot' concern than males across all five domains, with the widest gaps on environmental impact (80.0% females vs 38.1% males, a 41.9-point gap) and the power of AI companies (84.0% vs 50.0%, a 34-point gap).

Misinformation & Safety



> *I'm positive about AI. However, I'm worried about the fact that people completely trust AI and use it as a fact. This will shape the narratives of society. Other than that, I feel AI has increased access to knowledge.*
>
> **26-YEAR OLD MALE, URBAN, FULL TIME EMPLOYEE**

What Would Make AI Safer?

Nepali youth favour stronger laws and governance above all else: 78.9% say stronger laws would make AI safer, followed closely by digital literacy training (66.2%) and better reporting systems (66.2%), then platform accountability (62.0%) and community awareness campaigns (52.1%). This reflects a global pattern in which users feel that self-regulation by technology companies is insufficient to address misinformation, algorithmic bias, and data privacy breaches. Notably, 40.8% of Nepal's respondents want AI design that considers females specifically, nearly double the 11-country average of 23%, a striking result given the pronounced female-dominant concern gaps documented above, and a clear signal that gender-responsive design is a distinct priority for young Nepalis.
Female respondents express markedly higher levels of worry than male respondents across every concern domain, safety-limiting behaviour and misinformation concern alike; for instance, 68.0% of females say safety concerns limit their AI use, compared with 52.4% of males.

Daily users in Nepal frequently report lower systemic concern than non-daily users, the reverse of the wider 11-country pattern, where familiarity breeds concern rather than comfort. With only 12-13 non-daily users in the Nepal sample, this reversal should be treated as a hypothesis for the next survey round rather than a settled finding, but it is consistent across all five concern domains and therefore unlikely to be inaccurate.

Misinformation Concern Levels: 74.3% of respondents in Nepal are concerned about AI-generated misinformation (a further 2.9% are sometimes concerned), and deepfakes rank consistently high across youth demographics. It is widely perceived as an urgent, immediate threat to social cohesion, political stability, and personal trust online.

Regarding whether safety concerns limit AI use: 58.6% of Nepal respondents say "yes" or "sometime", indicating that safety concerns act as a practical bottleneck for a majority of young Nepalis (58.6% yes, a further 24.3% sometimes), not just an occasional hesitation, and, as noted above, considerably more so for females (68.0%) than males (52.4%).

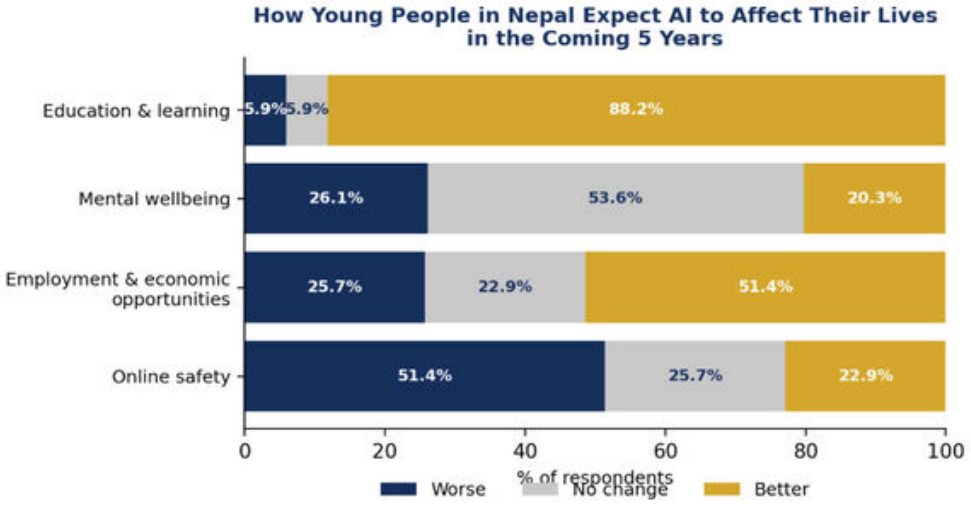
6. EMPLOYMENT, FUTURES & SENTIMENT

88%

of Nepal respondents expect AI to have a positive impact on education & learning in the next 5 years

11-COUNTRY BENCHMARK

11-country average: 71% expect positive impact on education



Education and learning draw the strongest optimism: 88.2% of respondents in Nepal expect AI to have a better impact here over the next five years, well above the 11-country average of 71%, with only 5.9% expecting it to worsen and 5.9% expecting no change. Views are more mixed elsewhere. On employment and economic opportunities, 51.4% expect improvement, 25.7% expect things to worsen and 22.9% expect no change, a broadly optimistic balance that sits Nepal closer to the 11-country 'leapfrog' countries such as Uganda and Tanzania than to the UK, where pessimism dominates. Online safety is the one domain where pessimism wins out: 51.4% expect it to worsen, against 22.9% who expect improvement, echoing the wider survey finding that online safety is the area of greatest concern across all 11 countries. On mental wellbeing, most respondents (53.6%) expect no real change, with roughly equal minorities expecting it to worsen (26.1%) or improve (20.3%).

On whether AI might affect their own income, Nepal's respondents split fairly evenly: 30.0% say they are a little worried, 22.9% very worried, 30.0% not sure, and 17.1% neutral.

Rather than a single sentiment score, Nepal's long-answer responses paint a pragmatic and largely optimistic picture, closer to Uganda and Tanzania's leapfrog framing than to the UK's displacement framing.

Many respondents describe AI as a tool to be worked with rather than feared: one 32-year-old male called it "a mirror that reflects humanity", arguing AI is "about amplifying human potential, not replacing it", while a 27-year-old self-employed freelancer credited AI with directly raising his income by cutting the time cost of his work.

Several respondents from Karnali and other rural areas explicitly connected optimism to infrastructure: AI "has the potential to empower young people... by improving access to knowledge, digital skills, and economic opportunities", but only "if rural youth can also benefit" from better connectivity and local-language support. Concern clusters most heavily around two areas: entry-level displacement in IT and other white-collar work; several respondents in accounting, software development and law described AI as already narrowing entry-level opportunities in their fields, and erosion of independent thinking, echoed in phrases like "AI is making our brain fog and slow" and warnings about a "dependency trap" for younger users. Gender differences in employment expectations were not pronounced in the qualitative data; however, as noted in Section 4, females report a more significant impact of AI on income and employment than men do.

7. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Nepal's data describe a country engaging with AI faster and more intensively than the 11-country average; 82% use it daily, against 64% overall, and do so with a notably positive outlook, particularly on education (88% expect improvement, against 71% overall). This is not evenly distributed engagement, however: young females in Nepal report using AI for academic support and job-search more than young males, reversing the pattern seen in most of the other 10 countries, even as they remain marginally less confident in their own AI knowledge and considerably more concerned about its risks. High usage has not translated into income: only 14% earn money through AI, in line with the wider survey, despite the highest learning and productivity use rates recorded almost anywhere in the sample.

The barriers that remain are as much about trust and infrastructure as about cost. Data costs (44%) and fear of scams (39%) are the two most-cited obstacles, sitting on top of a genuinely uneven national picture- 79% internet penetration in Kathmandu Valley against roughly 14% in Karnali Province, and broadband costs that consume some three times the international affordability benchmark. Nepal's respondents translate this into a clear, specific policy ask: 79% want stronger laws, and, more distinctively, 41% want AI design that explicitly considers females, nearly double the 11-country average, a direct echo of the sharp female-dominant concern gaps documented in Sections 4 and 5.

Nepal's National AI Policy (2082), approved in August 2025, provides a live vehicle for government, industry, and civil society to act on these findings, provided implementation reaches beyond Kathmandu and beyond the urban, English-speaking, well-educated youth who dominate this sample.

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF NEPAL

- Accelerate implementation of the National AI Policy (2082): stand up the National AI Centre and AI Regulation Council with clear budget lines, given that 79% of Nepali youth want stronger laws and only 41% currently think AI reflects their own language and culture.
- Target connectivity subsidies at Karnali Province and other low-penetration areas (14% vs. 79% in Kathmandu Valley), and cap broadband pricing relative to income, since data costs (44%) and affordability, not lack of interest, are the leading barriers to access.
- Embed a gender-responsive design mandate in AI procurement and certification standards, reflecting that 41% of young Nepalis, well above the 11-country average of 23%, explicitly want AI design that considers females, and align implementation with Nepal's Constitution, Periodic Plans, the SDGs, and relevant sectoral strategies.

FOR TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES

- Invest in Nepali-language support and cultural context: only 25.4% of respondents currently use AI in Nepali, but 36.6% would like to, and 37% say AI tools do not reflect their language, culture or context.
- Offer fair compensation and clear career pathways for Nepal-based AI training, labelling and development work, building on the country's existing $515m IT-services export base rather than treating it purely as a consumer market.

FOR RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT & NGO PARTNERS

- Extend existing Restless Development youth-hub networks to deliver digital and AI literacy training in Karnali and other low-connectivity provinces, where the survey's rural sample (n=12) is too small to be conclusive but points to a real access gap.
- Train young leaders to ethically collect and steward local-language AI data, addressing the 37% of respondents who feel AI tools do not reflect Nepali language and culture.
- Mobilise youth peer networks to spot, report and counter AI-generated misinformation, given that 74% of respondents are already concerned about it.

- Lobby for the National AI Regulation Council to prioritise online safety, the one area where young Nepalis expect things to get worse over the next five years (51% worse vs. 23% better), and for mental-health support that responds to the many respondents who describe over-reliance and reduced critical thinking.
- base rather than treating it purely as a consumer market.

FOR ALL SECTORS (GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY, FUNDERS, ACADEMIA)

- Fund targeted AI-literacy and confidence-building programmes for young females: Nepal's gender gap in self-reported AI knowledge is narrower than the 11-country average (6.9 points vs. 15), but the gap in concern is among the widest recorded, up to 42 points on environmental impact, suggesting females need a seat in design and governance conversations, not just more training.
- Host recurring, youth-led policy dialogues feeding directly into the National AI Regulation Council, so that youth civil society shapes how the National AI Policy (2082) is implemented.

"AI is a powerful tool that can greatly support young people in learning, career growth, and personal development... With the right use, AI can create a better future for everyone."

24-YEAR-OLD MALE, STUDENT, RURAL NEPAL

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