

Women, Business and the Law (WBL) is a World Bank Group flagship initiative providing comparable data on laws and policies impacting women’s economic participation to drive jobs, productivity, and economic growth. Economies with higher WBL scores tend to have higher female labor force participation rates, more women business owners and managers, and narrower gender wage gaps.

Women in the South Asia region have less than half (44.3%) of the economic rights afforded to men. Only about a third (36.6%) of the implementing policies and institutions needed for women to exercise their rights are in place. Experts in the region perceive that women’s economic rights are enforced at slightly more than a third (35.3%) of their full potential.

Reform Highlights from October 2023 to October 2025



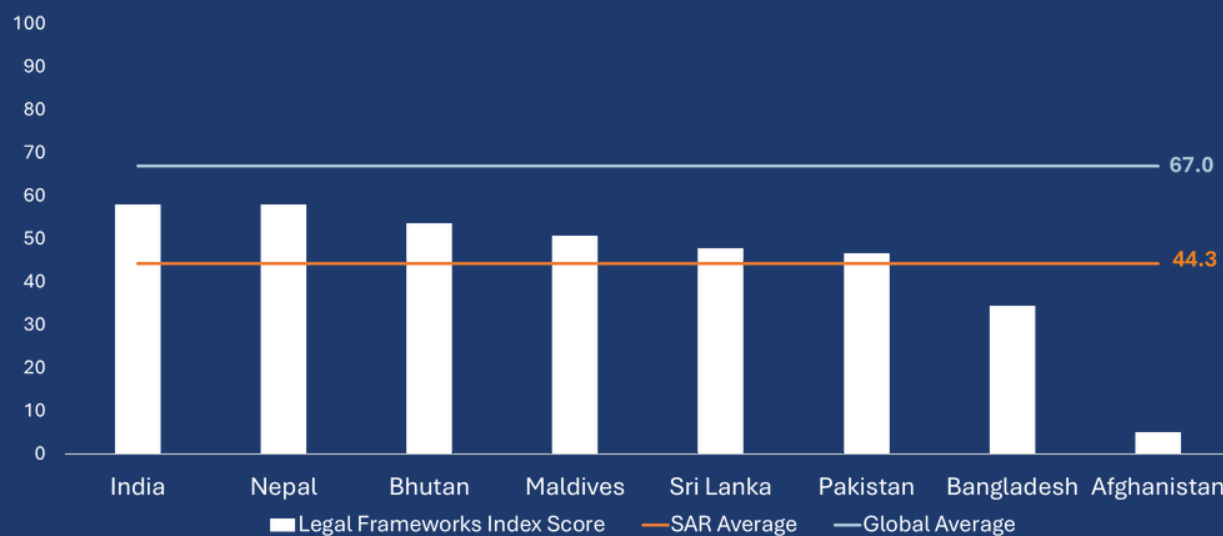
Only one economy in South Asia has enacted reforms to provide women with greater access to economic opportunities.



In January 2024, **Sri Lanka** enacted legislation on cyberharassment, introducing criminal penalties for such conduct.

[Click here for a full list of reforms](#)

Legal Frameworks Index Scores for South Asia - WBL 2026 Index

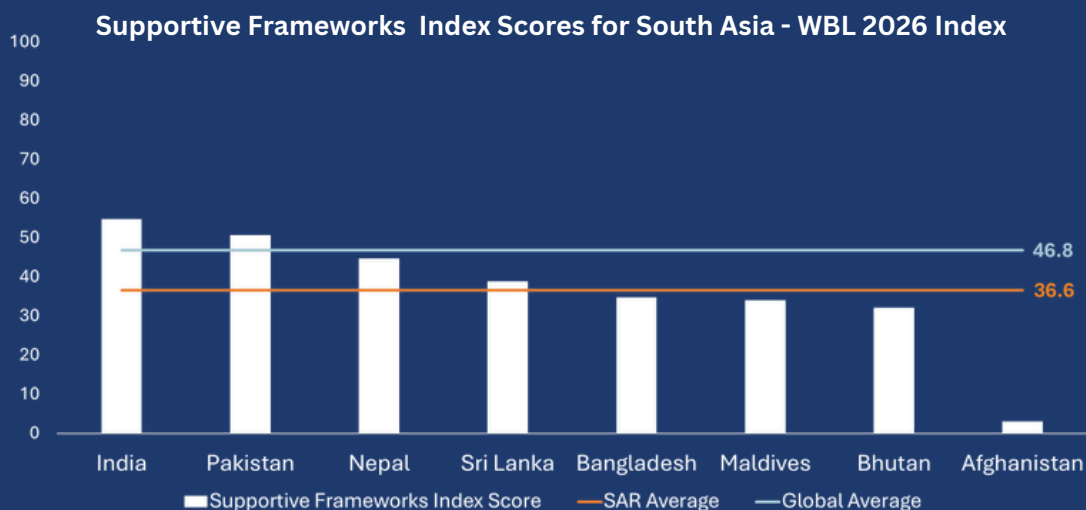


Legal Frameworks: Measuring equal rights and explicit restrictions on women’s work and entrepreneurship

- Across the region, no economy performs above the global average, indicating relatively weak legal frameworks promoting women’s access to economic opportunities.
- The **Mobility** and **Marriage** topics perform well with average regional scores of 75.00 and 62.5, respectively.
- The **Childcare** and **Entrepreneurship** topics show the most room for improvement with average regional scores of 9.4 and 29.7, respectively, indicating persistent gaps in laws providing access to childcare and laws supporting female entrepreneurship. To close such gaps, economies could introduce laws establishing financial support for families and quality standards for childcare services and non-discrimination in access to credit for entrepreneurs.

Good Practice Legal and Supportive Frameworks

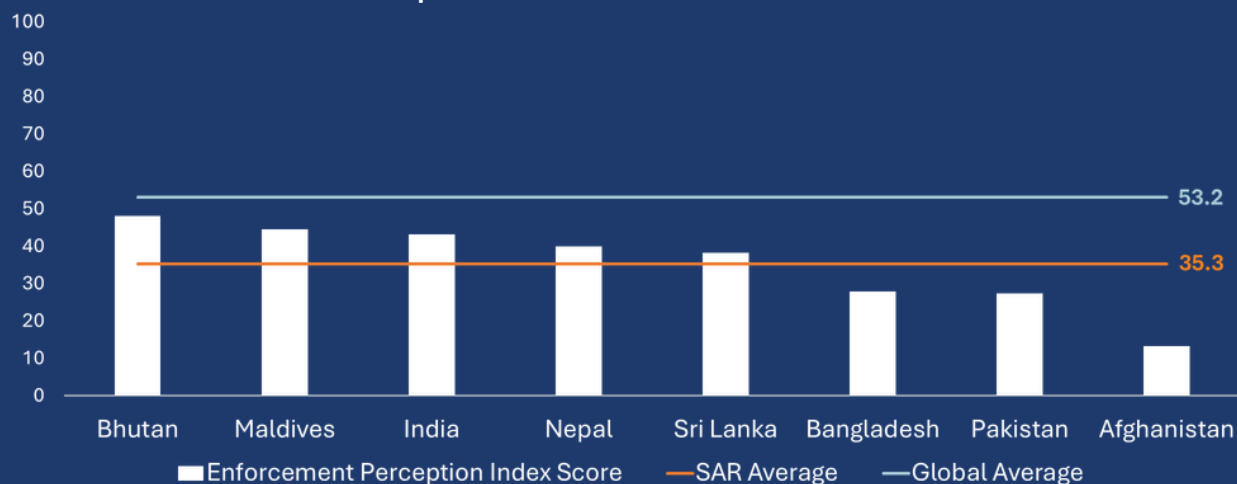
- **Maldives** is the only economy in South Asia where the law explicitly prohibits discrimination in recruitment based on marital status, parental status, and age.
- **Sri Lanka** is the only economy in the region with a publicly available registry of childcare providers.



Supportive Frameworks: Examining policy instruments designed to support the implementation of laws

- Across the region, policies and institutions to implement equal opportunity laws are strongest in **India** and **Pakistan**. Most room for improvement remains in **Bhutan** and **Afghanistan**.
- The **Marriage**, **Entrepreneurship**, and **Mobility** topics perform relatively well with average regional scores of 60.9, 54.1, and 53.1, respectively.
- The **Childcare** topic shows the most room for improvement with an average regional score of 3.1, indicating gaps in policies and institutions supporting the availability, affordability, and quality of center-based childcare. To close such gaps, economies could establish registries of accredited childcare providers and systems for monitoring the quality of services and provide clear application procedures for financial support.

Enforcement Perceptions Index Scores for South Asia - WBL 2026 Index



Enforcement Perceptions: Evaluating expert views of how well public authorities enforce laws in practice

- **Bhutan** is the highest scoring economy (48.2%), suggesting that laws protecting women’s economic rights are enforced less than half of the time. Lowest enforcement levels are perceived in **Pakistan** and **Afghanistan**.
- Across the region, experts assess the enforcement of laws providing access to **Childcare** at only 3.5% of their full potential and the enforcement of women’s rights to **Safety** at only 13.1% of their full potential.