



**Comprehensive National Review Report  
Beijing+30**

**Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and  
Platform for Action 1995**

**Ministry of Women and Children Affairs  
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
September 2024**

## List of Abbreviations

A2i	Aspire to Innovate Programme
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BASIS	Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau Statistics
BCCSAP	Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
Beijing+30	30th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action
BGB	Border Guard Bangladesh
BNPS	Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
BPWN	Bangladesh Police Women Network
CAPI	Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing
CCs	Community Clinics
CCGAP	Climate Change and Gender Action Plan
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CIVPOL	Civilian Police
CMSMEs	Cottage, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
COICOP	Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRF	Community Resilience Fund
CRI	Centre for Research and Information
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CSSR	COVID-19 School Sector Response
DDM	Department of Disaster Management
DIFE	Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments
DoL	Department of Labour
DWA	Department of Women Affairs
EIS	Employment Injury Scheme
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FC	Finance Companies
FDMN	Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals
FET	Female Engagement Team
FPAB	Family Planning Association of Bangladesh
FPU	Formed Police Units
FY	Fiscal Year
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFT	Gender Financed Tracking
GiHA WG	Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group
GII	Gender Inequality Index

GLO.ACT	Global Action against Trafficking of Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants
GPI	Gender Parity Index
GRB	Gender-responsive budgeting
HCD	High Court Division
HCTT	Humanitarian Coordination Task Team
HDI	Human Development Index
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HPNSP	Health Population and Nutrition Sector Programme
HRC	Human Rights Council
HRFDs	Human Rights Focal Desks
HSC	Higher secondary certificate
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICTD	Information and Communication Technology Division
ICVGD	Investment Component for Vulnerable Group Development
iDEA	Innovation Design and Entrepreneurship Academy
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMCG	Inter-Ministerial Coordination Group
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPO	Individual Police Officer
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
IT	Information technology
JMS	Jatiya Mahila Shangstha
LCG	Local Consultative Group
LCG WAGE	Local Consultative Group on Women's Advancement and Gender Equality
LDC	Least Developed Country
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LNOB	Leave no one behind
LoGIC	Local Government Initiative on Climate Change
MCBP	Mother and Child Benefit Programme
M CPP	Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support and services
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MINUSMA-1	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MoLJPA	Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
MMR	Maternal mortality rates
MoDMR	Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MoHFW	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoIB	Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
MoLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment

MONUSCO-1	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MoPA	Ministry of Public Administration
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
MoSW	Ministry of Social Welfare
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MoWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
MoYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
MPDR	Maternal and Perinatal Death Review
MPDSR	Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response
MPs	Members of Parliament
MSMEs	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NAP NWDP	National Action Plan on the implementation of the National Women Development Policy
NAP WPS	National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security
NCWCD	National Council for the Development of Women and Children
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGOAB	NGO Affairs Bureau
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NIMM	National Institute of Mass Media
NPA	National Plan of Action
NPDM	National Plan for Disaster Management
NPT	National priority targets
NSDS	National Strategy for the Development of
NSPD	National Survey on Persons with Disabilities
NSS	National Statistical System
NWDP 2011	National Women Development 2011
PBCRG	Performance Based Climate Resilience Grants
PCSW	Police Cyber Support for Women
PHC	Primary Health Care
PLAU	Policy Leadership Advocacy Unit
PP2041	Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021-2041
PSVI	Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict
RB	Revised Budget
RCGP	Recurrent, Capital, Gender, and Poverty
RMG	Readymade garment industry
RRRC	Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
SADDD	Sex, age, and disability disaggregated data
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SID	Statistics and Informatics Division
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SPI	Social Progress Index
SR	Special Rapporteur

SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SSC	Secondary school certificate
SVRS	Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics
SWAPNO	Strengthening Women's Ability for Productive New Opportunities
TBIP	Transform backward youth into industrial workers to increase industrial productivity
TES	Transforming Education Summit
TMED	Technical and Madrasa Division
TOT	Training of Trainers
TUS	Time Use Survey
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UHC	Universal health coverage
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNJOB	United Nations Jobs (referring to the UN's employment platform)
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNPOL	United Nations Police
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
VAW	Violence against Women
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
VGf	Vulnerable group feeding
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WEF	World Economic Forum
WFID	Women's Financial Inclusion Data
WID	Women in Development
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security

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## Section one: Introduction

The advancement of women and the realization of gender equality are fundamental to human rights and prerequisites for social justice. In Bangladesh, women have been playing significant role in nation building as agents of change since liberation war. In the recent student led July mass uprising 2024, women especially female students and girls have played an extremely courageous role that ultimately determined the course of the movement. The mass uprising has represented a historic turning point in the fight for equality and non-discrimination where people from all walks of life especially women have participated to fight against systemic inequities and injustices.

The July 2024 mass upsurge saw female martyrs that indicated their enormous sacrifices towards building a discrimination free society. Chief Adviser Professor Dr Muhammad Yunus, in his speech at the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) acknowledged women's contribution and said, "Young girls were fiercely vocal against the illegitimate State power. Mothers, day labours and scores of people across cities lent their shoulders, for their children". Many women, mostly mothers, acted as human shields to protect the student protesters and provided them first aid, water and food, and took the injured to hospitals. The active participation of women in such an unprecedented mass uprising reinforced their significant contribution and commitment in Bangladesh's social, political, and economic landscape, pushing for equal representation and opportunities across all sectors of society. Achieving political, social, economic, cultural rights and environmental security for all peoples represents the only path towards constructing a just, sustainable, and advanced society. Central to this is the empowerment of women and advancement of gender equality.

In 2025, the global community will mark the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), 25th anniversary of the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325, and the final five years of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing+30), the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will review and evaluate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). The goal is to expedite the attainment of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Bangladesh is party to several significant international conventions and agreements on the advancement of women's and girls' rights and gender equality. Bangladesh endorsed the BPfA in 1995, ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1984<sup>1</sup>, the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1990, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007, among others, and pledged to support the Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals (S/MDGs) in 2000 and 2015 respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> While ratifying the Convention, Bangladesh maintains its reservation on articles 2 and 16 (l) (c). However, in principle Bangladesh actually has made significant progress in line with article 2, by promoting women's equality in several areas and has been ranked the top country among its South Asian neighbors by performing the best in narrowing the gender gap.

## 1.1. Core elements

As required by the UN Economic and Social Council decision 2022/5,<sup>2</sup> the sixty-ninth session of the CSW will undertake a review and appraisal of the implementation of the BPfA and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, for which all States are called upon to undertake a national-level review of progress made and challenges encountered. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) of the Government of Bangladesh undertakes this comprehensive national-level review to assess the progress made on the implementation of the BPfA and reflect on the challenges encountered. The national review report offers a thorough analysis of the advancements made over the previous five years (2020–2024), the difficulties encountered, and the current status of gender equality in Bangladesh, substantiated by examples of measures taken, best practices and lessons learnt across the twelve critical areas of concern of the BPfA. It details government initiatives, including policies, strategies, programs, and projects, highlighting best practices and lessons learned with transformative potential. Looking forward, the report identifies the priorities of the government to accelerate the implementation of the BPfA in pursuit of gender equality and women’s advancement in the next five years.

The report follows the structure outlined in the ‘Guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews’ formulated by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the relevant regional commissions. Following the Guidance Note, a semi-structured questionnaire was prepared to solicit input from government stakeholders and agencies, complementing the comprehensive desk review of government, UN, and civil society organizations (CSO) documents. The responses from the government agencies have been duly integrated into the report. The report was prepared under the leadership of the MoWCA.

## 1.2. Synthesis

Bangladesh has made remarkable advancements in recent years with accelerated income growth and economic development including on gender equality and women empowerment. For the past ten consecutive years, the country has secured the top position among South Asian countries in ensuring gender equality.<sup>3</sup> Akin, Bangladesh has seen consistent improvements on the Social Progress Index (SPI),<sup>4</sup> increasing five rankings since 2011 from a score of 45.49 to 54.60 in 2023.<sup>5</sup> The fast-growing economy has played a critical role in facilitating the country’s considerable social progress and development.

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<sup>2</sup> *Thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, ECOSOC Res 2022/5, 2022 session, Social and human rights questions: advancement of women, Agenda item 19 (a), UN Doc E/RES/2022/5 (17 June 2022, adopted 8 June 2022)

<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Reports*, 2014–2024, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/series/global-gender-gap-report/>, (accessed 15 September 2024).

<sup>4</sup> The Social Progress Index is one of the world’s largest curated collections of social and environmental data. The index concentrates on non-economic aspects of global social performance, across 170 countries, with progress data covering 13 years (2011–2023).

<sup>5</sup> ‘[Global Social Progress Index](https://www.socialprogress.org/social-progress-index)’, *Social Progress Imperative*, 2011 & 2023, <https://www.socialprogress.org/social-progress-index>, (accessed 15 September 2024).

Bangladesh has undertaken several legislative initiatives and reforms that pave the way for improving gender equality and gender justice. The country amended its age-old Evidence Act by inserting a provision that disallows character evidence against rape victims and enacted the Child Day Care Center Act 2021. Several national action plans were updated to include actions to address emerging issues. Women's role, contribution, and engagement in national and international institutions has been strengthened, enabling them to contribute to decision-making and render services for the common people. In this regard, the contribution of female Bangladeshi Peacekeepers in the UN mission deserves special mention.

The remarkable "Ashrayan Project" of Bangladesh has contributed to women's empowerment by giving women shared ownership of land and houses. The 'She Power Project- Sustainable Development for Women through Information, Communication, Technology (ICT)' is facilitating the creation of a competent female workforce and group of entrepreneurs in Bangladesh's ICT sector. Social transfer initiatives, such as the "Strengthening Women's Ability for Productive New Opportunities" (SWAPNO) project is helping severely impoverished rural women find work and contribute to community services.

Apart from achievements and progress, several challenges and setbacks created hindrances towards the effective realization of gender equality and the implementation of BPfA, such as the COVID-19 pandemic which significantly impacted economic and social progress, creating direct and indirect challenges for the implementation of the BPfA. Additionally, Bangladesh is the 7th most vulnerable country in the world, experiences numerous severe disasters annually. Since 2020, the country has faced annual monsoon floods, been struck by tropical cyclones hitting coastal areas four times each year and has also endured heat waves over the past two years.

Being an emerging developing country with a population of more than 165 million (83 million female and 8,124 Hijra)<sup>6</sup> and on track to graduate from the 'Least Developed Country' (LDC) classification in 2026, Bangladesh is rendering its best efforts to accelerate progress on the advancement of gender equality. Moving forward, investment in gender-focused programs and initiatives, along with robust data collection and analysis, will help identify gaps and measure progress, ensuring that resources are effectively allocated. Strengthening partnerships with international organizations and local stakeholders will further amplify these efforts, driving meaningful change and promoting gender equality across all sectors of society.

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<sup>6</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Population & Housing Census 2022: National Report Volume I*, 2023, [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-01-31-15-51-b53c55dd692233ae401ba013060b9cbb.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-01-31-15-51-b53c55dd692233ae401ba013060b9cbb.pdf), (accessed 15 September 2024).

## Section two: Achievements, challenges, setbacks, and priorities

Bangladesh has witnessed remarkable progress in the last five years in the areas of gender equality and women empowerment, despite challenges and setbacks. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic inevitably slowed down the country’s overall economic growth and progress, the country tackled the crisis effectively with the help of timely, efficient, and concerted interventions by responsible government agencies, private sector actors, and civil society.

Internationally recognized for its progress on several gender equality indicators, Bangladesh has emerged as the top performer in South Asia in terms of gender parity for the tenth consecutive year in 2024 according to the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Reports.<sup>7</sup> Garnering a score of 0.689, Bangladesh ranks 99th among 146 economies.<sup>8</sup> The country has the highest gender parity score in political empowerment in the South Asia Region (54.3%) and seventh overall.<sup>9</sup> The country also performs well in educational attainment, with a 94 per cent attainment rate reflecting full parity in secondary enrolment, gender parity in literacy rate of 93 per cent, and gender parity in tertiary enrolment of 84.1 per cent.<sup>10</sup> Bangladesh’s Gender Parity Index (GPI) ranking decreased by 30 places from 2023.<sup>11</sup> Whilst this is largely due to an update to the 2017 values for economic indicators used in prior calculations, economic gender parity has deteriorated over the past five years, leaving Bangladesh with a wider gender gap to close.<sup>12</sup>

Table 1 Global Gender Gap Index Ranking: Southern Asia 2024.

Global Gender Gap Index Ranking: Southern Asia				
Economy	Rank		Score	Change vs. 2023
	Regional	Global*		
Bangladesh	1	99	0.689	▼
Nepal	2	117	0.664	▼
Sri Lanka	3	122	0.653	▼
Bhutan	4	124	0.651	▼
India	5	129	0.641	▼
Maldives	6	132	0.633	▼
Pakistan	7	145	0.570	▼

\*Global ranking, out of 146 countries.

Source: 2024 Global Gender Gap Report

<sup>7</sup> K.K. Pal, K. Piaget, and S. Zahidi, *Global Gender Gap Report 2024: Insight Report*, World Economic Forum, 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/>, (accessed 15 September 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

In 2023, Bangladesh ranked 121st out of 170 nations in the SPI, which evaluates a nation's performance on a broad variety of social and environmental performance factors. Bangladesh's SPI has increased from 45.49 in 2011 to 54.60 in 2023, resulting in a five-rank increase. Bangladesh was ranked 107 in the dimension of basic needs, 121 in the component of the foundation of wellbeing, and 145 in the dimension of opportunities. In fact, the country has indicated overperformance in safety (feeling safe walking alone, ranking 36<sup>th</sup>), basic water services (ranking 64<sup>th</sup>), and access to online governance (ranking 74<sup>th</sup>).<sup>13</sup> Bangladesh's positive development trajectory is also evident from the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, and having a decent standard of living. Since 1990, Bangladesh has increased its HDI from 0.399 to 0.670 in 2022, now falling within the medium human development category, ranking 134 out of 204 countries and territories.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Bangladesh ranks 131 on the Gender Inequality Index (GII), a measure of gender inequality along the dimensions of reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market. The GII score for Bangladesh has declined from 0.699 in 1990 to 0.498 in 2022.<sup>15</sup> This is attributed to the achievements in reducing gender-based inequalities over the past decade. At the end of 2019, the year prior to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the BPfA, Bangladesh indicated steady improvements on gender equality, with a strong foundation for accelerated progress in the lead up to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the BPfA in 2025.

## 2.1. Achievements

### 2.1.1. Policy and legislative initiatives and reforms

Since 2020, several legislative and policy initiatives and reforms have been undertaken by the Government of Bangladesh. These initiatives and reforms have created enabling frameworks for the implementation of the 12 critical actions of the BPfA, ensuring human rights and women's rights.

#### Policy initiatives and reforms

**Updated National Action Plan on the National Women Development Policy 2011:** The commitment to establishing equal rights of women and men in state and public life, and ensuring their full and equality participation, is outlined in the National Women Development Policy (NWDP) 2011, in line with the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. The NWDP 2011 sets the directives of the government and civil society's efforts to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment. In an effort to strengthen the implementation of the NWDP 2011, the National Action Plan (NAP) on the implementation of the NWPD 2011, adopted by MoWCA in 2013, was revised and updated in 2023, to reflect emerging opportunities and challenges. The updated NAP NWDP 2021-2030 provides a comprehensive framework to guide the implementation of the NWDP 2011, across 54 ministries, based on the 12 critical areas of concern

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<sup>13</sup> 'Global Social Progress Index', Social Progress Imperative, 2011 & 2023, <https://www.socialprogress.org/social-progress-index>, (accessed on 26 June 2024).

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Development Programme, 'Bangladesh', *Data Futures Exchange*, n.d., <https://data.undp.org/countries-and-territories/BGD#:~:text=Bangladesh's%20Human%20Development%20Index%20value,of%20204%20countries%20and%20territories>, (accessed 26 June 2024).

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Development Programme, 'Gender Inequality Index', *Human Development Reports*, n.d., <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>, (accessed 26 June 2024).

in the BPfA and mapped against the SDG indicators and the Development Results Framework of the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan 2020-2025.

**Updated Bangladesh Climate Change and Gender Action Plan:** In 2023, Bangladesh adopted an updated Climate Change and Gender Action Plan (CCGAP). The country first developed the CCGAP in 2013, outlining a strategy for incorporating gender concerns into climate change activities, including guidelines for several critical sectors, such as agriculture, water resources, energy, health, and livelihoods. Underscoring the unique challenges of women in coping with climate change, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) took the initiative to revise the CCGAP to address the increasing climate change risks, acknowledging that gender equality is a critical driver of climate resilience and sustainable development. The updated CCGAP includes, for the first time, a dedicated priority on women’s leadership, in addition to five other areas: natural resources, livelihoods, infrastructure, gender-responsive implementations; and capacity-building, knowledge management and communication. The CCGAP lays out a roadmap for the sustainable integration of gender in climate efforts in Bangladesh and offers specific action plans, measurable progress indicators, and prospective stakeholders, establishing a strong basis for gender-responsive climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.

### **Legislative initiatives and reforms**

**Village Courts (amendment) Act 2024:** The government amended the Village Courts Act 2006 in 2024 to strengthen its functioning with an aim to ensure easy and speedy access to justice for poor and disadvantaged people, including women. The new law increases the pecuniary jurisdiction from BDT 75,000 (USD 641)<sup>16</sup> to BDT 300,000 (USD 2,564) which will allow the disputants to resolve the cases without incurring expenses and the complexity of legal procedures in the District Courts. Most importantly, the amended Act has included a provision allowing wives to file suits for maintenance. Many married rural women in Bangladesh are housewives and their husbands are the sole earning members of the family. The husband’s marriage abandonment has serious consequences on women and their children’s financial security. Before the inclusion of this provision, no family disputes were triable by the Village Court system, but now any cases of recovery of maintenance within the pecuniary jurisdiction of BDT 300,000 (USD 2,564) can be dealt with by the Village Court. This will allow for greater access to justice, and subsequently economic empowerment of women.

**Evidence (amendment) Act 2022:** Bangladesh amended the Evidence Act 1872 in 2022, broadening the definition of ‘evidence’ to include physical or forensic evidence, including the admissibility of digital evidence by the court, as well as repealing Section 155(4) under which the prosecutrix of the rape case can be shown as of generally immoral character and amending Section 146(3) making questions about a rape victim’s character possible only with the court’s permission. This is a milestone amendment for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and a remarkable achievement in establishing women’s rights. Earlier, it was permissible to question a survivor’s character by asking degrading questions in the court which often led to victim-blaming and re-traumatization, as well as discouraging survivors to file cases. This new reform, following advocacy from civil society organisations (CSOs), protects the dignity and privacy of the survivor,

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<sup>16</sup> USD 1.00 = BDT 117.00 (Bangladesh Bank, 1 June 2024).

and thus, contributes to a more equitable and just legal process, that is more supportive to survivors.

**Child Day Care Centre Act 2021:** The Child Day Care Centre Act 2021 was introduced in 2021 to provide standards and regulations for the operation of daycare centres so that children may be cared for and well-being is guaranteed in a comfortable atmosphere while their parents are at work. The law establishes four types of child daycare centres: government-subsidized daycare centres; daycare centres operated by government agencies, departments, or statutory bodies, providing free services; commercial daycare centres run by individuals or organizations; and non-profit daycare centres managed by individuals, organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), clubs, associations, or entities in the corporate or industrial sectors. All daycare centres must be registered with a dedicated authority under MoWCA, which is responsible for their regulation and oversight. MoWCA established and is operating 63 Daycare Centres throughout the country.<sup>17</sup> The ministry also has taken several initiatives to establish more daycare centres as per the need. Other government offices also are initiating to establish daycare centres following the Day Care Centre Act 2021. The impact of the introduction of the Child Day Care Centre Act 2021 on gender equality is manifold. It provides support for working parents, particularly mothers, by facilitating access to regulated childcare, which promotes greater female workforce participation and economic empowerment, while also formalizing the childcare sector to ensure high-quality, safe care for children. The Government of Bangladesh has committed to reaching a female labour force participation rate of 50 per cent by 2030, as well as gender parity in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector by 2041.<sup>18</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan has also committed to reduce the proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, as well as increase the proportion of women in managerial positions.

### 2.1.2. Flagship Projects and Programmes

Over the past five years, the Government of Bangladesh implemented a series of flagship programs aimed at advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, directly contributing to the implementation of the BPfA.

**Mother and Child Benefit Program:** The Mother and Child Benefit Programme is Bangladesh's flagship social protection initiative for disadvantaged children in their early years. Established in 2019 through the consolidation of the rural-based maternal allowance and the urban-based lactating mother allowance programmes, this programme ensures proper nutrition for both mother and child, supporting the developmental outcomes during pregnancy and early childhood (ages 0-4). The programme has supported 1.254 million persons in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-2023, increasing to 13.04 lac persons in FY2023-2024, with an ultimate target to reach 6 million beneficiaries by 2026.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Information obtained from the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in July 2024.

<sup>18</sup> Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *SDG Summit 2023: Bangladesh Country Commitments*, 2023, <https://sdgs.un.org/national-commitments-sdg-transformation/22071>, (accessed 15 September 2024).

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Social Security Programs: Fiscal Year 2023-2024*, n.d., [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/a8e415d0\\_c5f2\\_4d5a\\_8c7c\\_bcd8beb88140/Social%20Security%20Programs\\_English\\_2023-24.pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/a8e415d0_c5f2_4d5a_8c7c_bcd8beb88140/Social%20Security%20Programs_English_2023-24.pdf), (accessed 15 September 2024)



In 2023, MoWCA initiated an expanded, more inclusive, nutrition-sensitive, and shock-responsive social protection programme (2023-2028), reforming the Mother and Child Benefit Programme (MCBP) and the Vulnerable Women Benefit Programme. The initiative scales up the beneficiary coverage across the country, ensuring cash transfers provide sufficient tenure increasing from 36 months (6 months of pregnancy and the 30 first months of the child’s life) to 48 months (6 months of pregnancy and the 42 first months of the child’s life). Focus is also put on strengthening program systems, including building capacities of central and field level staff. Additionally, the programme aims to improve the monitoring and reporting systems for social protection initiatives and establish robust grievance redress mechanisms to ensure community voices are heard and addressed effectively.

### **Tottho Apa (Info Lady): Empowering Women Through ICT Towards Digital Bangladesh**

**Project:** Women's participation in economic activities and their empowerment in this respect are vital preconditions for overall sustainable progress. The “Tottho Apa: Empowering Women Through ICT Towards Digital Bangladesh” project (Phase I for 2011-2016 and Phase II for 2017-2024), undertaken by MoWCA, is implemented across 490 Upazilas to improve the availability and access to information technology for under-privileged women in rural areas and to empower them through IT enabled services. Information centres have been established in each of the 490 upazilas across Bangladesh, staffed by one Information Service Officer and two Information Service Assistants, collectively known as Tottho Apas in the project area. They engage in a variety of activities including internet communication, consulting with experts, providing primary healthcare, ensuring access to local government services, conducting video conferences, and facilitating e-learning and e-commerce. Additionally, they visit village households in the project area to deliver information on topics such as education, health, law, business, gender, and agriculture using the devices (laptop, mobile, or tablet) they carry with them.

**Vulnerable Group Development Programme:** “The Vulnerable Women Benefit” (VWB) formerly known as “Vulnerable Group Development” (VGD) program started in 2010 and renamed in 2022, is a vital tool for the government to address chronic hunger and poverty among women in a sustainable and cost-effective manner. Through this initiative, the Government of Bangladesh provides vulnerable women with food support (30 kilogram of rice for two years, and fortified rice in some areas) along with capacity and skill development to aid their economic activities. To enhance the effectiveness of the life skills training provided by the VGD program, MoWCA has launched a pilot initiative called the “Investment Component for Vulnerable Group Development” (ICVGD) 2018-2025. This reformed strategy focuses on improving beneficiaries' business management skills through various life-skills courses. As a result, the program has significantly contributed to sustainable poverty alleviation for the ultra-poor women supported by ICVGD.<sup>20</sup>

**The Community Clinic:** Bangladesh's Community Clinic (CC) initiative is a ground-breaking attempt to supply basic medical services to rural communities.<sup>21</sup> The government established these

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<sup>20</sup> Department of Women Affairs, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *Investment Component for Vulnerable Group Development – 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase Project: Implementation guidelines 2020*, 2020, [https://dwa.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dwa.portal.gov.bd/miscellaneous\\_info/4abbac17\\_46df\\_4577\\_9d4a\\_e132821b2b71/2022-04-20-07-08-32a57f5934088abd8cf4a679306692a6.pdf](https://dwa.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dwa.portal.gov.bd/miscellaneous_info/4abbac17_46df_4577_9d4a_e132821b2b71/2022-04-20-07-08-32a57f5934088abd8cf4a679306692a6.pdf), (accessed 15 September 2024)

<sup>21</sup> [https://communityclinic.portal.gov.bd/site/page/a059f681-4e4b-43a3-8553-a82b49f5268f/-](https://communityclinic.portal.gov.bd/site/page/a059f681-4e4b-43a3-8553-a82b49f5268f/)

primary-level health clinics in cooperation with the local community. Through the use of CC projects as part of the Primary Health Care (PHC) strategy and a pluralistic health system, Bangladesh has achieved tremendous progress toward improving the health status of its people. Together with advancements in the social determinants of health, these initiatives have produced significant gains in a number of health-related metrics, outpacing those of many other developing countries and their neighbours. It is worth noting that the government plans to establish one community clinic for every 6,000 residents<sup>22</sup>.

### 2.1.3. Gender Statistics

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) carried out its first-ever Time-Use Survey (TUS) in 2021. This was a timely initiative as the COVID-19 pandemic unravelled a care crisis. The TUS provides valuable insights into how men and women divide labour based on a variety of demographic factors other than sex, including age, location, marital status, level of education attained, and occupation. Bangladesh conducted the TUS in 2021, which for the first time brought to light unpaid care and domestic work. In 2023, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council, called to include women's unpaid work in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) calculation,<sup>23</sup> which fostered the creation of a Household Production Satellite Account as a national priority currently in development through the collaboration of BBS, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), UN Women and national experts. The updated NAP NWDP 2021-2030 outlines a strong commitment to improving gender statistics. Key initiatives on gender statistics include the regular publication of gender budget reports with gender-focused analysis on expenditures and utilization, ensuring collection of sex-disaggregated data by all ministries and agencies, conducting and publishing research on time use of women, and incorporating the value of women's unpaid care and domestic in the formal accounting system. Furthermore, aligned with the goals of the 8th Five Year Plan, the Government of Bangladesh has initiated an update to the 2013 National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) in 2023, aiming to expand its commitments to gender statistics. Through the collaborative efforts of key stakeholders in the Bangladesh Statistical System (BSS), the draft NSDS 2024-2030 now incorporates an extensive section dedicated to gender statistics.

## 2.2. Setbacks

In the past five years, Bangladesh, as well as the rest of the world, experienced unprecedented crisis, including the COVID-19 global pandemic and increased frequency and intensity of natural hazards, affecting the implementation of the BPfA. These crises have exacerbated existing inequalities, intensifying the challenges faced by the most vulnerable, including women, children,

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<sup>22</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024*, 2023,

[https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>23</sup> Star Business Report, 'Include Women's Unpaid Work in GDP Calculation: PM', *The Daily Star*, 4 April 2023, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/include-womens-unpaid-work-gdp-calculation-pm-3288691>, (Accessed 11 July 2024).

and gender-diverse groups. Concerted efforts by the Government of Bangladesh, as well as private sector and CSOs, ensured timely provision of relief to those in need.

### 2.2.1. COVID-19 pandemic

Since March 2020, Bangladesh grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, redefining the everyday life of people in Bangladesh. Despite the high population density, the death toll was 29,462.<sup>24</sup> On the socioeconomic front, losses were unprecedented, aggravating existing vulnerabilities. The elderly, the poor, refugees, migrants, women and children, and other vulnerable groups were disproportionately affected due to their specific health and socioeconomic circumstances. The GDP, growth slowed considerably, export earnings decreased, private and public investment rates fell, and government fiscal revenue was impacted.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of gender equality, the pandemic significantly halted progress. Domestic workers, owners and workers in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), daily labourers, street vendors, cleaners, sex workers, and other informal workers rapidly lost their jobs and means to earn an income.<sup>26</sup> As per Bangladesh National Garments Workers Employees League an estimated 50,000 garment workers, predominantly women, lost their jobs due to the pandemic.<sup>27</sup> Lockdown, social distancing, and school closures, among other, further exacerbated the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, as well as disrupted girls access to education. GBV intensified, whilst access to essential services, safe spaces, and support decreased due to movement restrictions. BRAC legal aid services received more than 25,000 complaints related to GBV within the first ten months of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>28</sup> Access to healthcare services was also severely disrupted, including access to essential services, such as sexual and reproductive services. The pandemic deepened-preexisting structural inequalities, widening the gender gap in Bangladesh.

The government responded swiftly to the COVID-19 pandemic following a ‘whole of society’ approach and the ‘leave no one behind (LNOB)’ principle.<sup>29</sup> On the health front, full and partial lockdowns were instituted to contain the spread of the virus; Personal Protective Equipment was provided to protect healthcare and frontline workers; healthcare facilities were strengthened with equipment and supplies; a vaccination programme was implemented; and mass awareness raising

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<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, *4<sup>th</sup> Cycle Universal Periodic Review, ‘National Report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and 16/21, Bangladesh’*, General Assembly, Forty-fourth session, UN Doc A/HRC/WG.6/44/BGD/1, (1 September 2023), <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/178/07/pdf/g2317807.pdf>, (accessed August 2024)

<sup>25</sup> General Economics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *Sustainable Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report 2022, 2022*, [https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b\\_4dc1\\_4744\\_be4a\\_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book\\_compressed.pdf](https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b_4dc1_4744_be4a_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book_compressed.pdf), (accessed August 2024)

<sup>26</sup> UN Women, *COVID-19 Bangladesh Rapid Gender Analysis*, 2020, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEA/Docs/Publications/2020/05/RGA%20BangladeshFinalMay2020.pdf>, (accessed August 2024)

<sup>27</sup> D. Das, COVID-19 Impacts on Female Employment in Bangladesh: An Impediment to Economic Development, *Centre for Governance Studies*, 30 May 2022, <https://cgs-bd.com/article/9033/COVID-19-Impacts-on-Female-Employment-in-Bangladesh--An-Impediment-to-Economic-Development>, (accessed July 2024).

<sup>28</sup> Brac, *Data underscores that gender-based violence is rising with COVID-19*, 22 December 2020, <https://www.brac.net/latest-news/item/1298-data-underscores-that-gender-based-violence-is-rising-with-covid-19>, (accessed June 2024).

<sup>29</sup> General Economics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *Sustainable Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report 2022, 2022*, [https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b\\_4dc1\\_4744\\_be4a\\_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book\\_compressed.pdf](https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b_4dc1_4744_be4a_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book_compressed.pdf), (accessed August 2024)

on health and safety measures were undertaken; among other.<sup>30</sup> The government also adopted a series of economic stimulus packages, estimated at BDT 1,877 billion, to offset the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>31</sup> Through the effective and timely implementation of the economic recovery programmes, Bangladesh is on a strong recovery trajectory from the pandemic.

### 2.2.2. Natural hazards

Bangladesh is classified as the seventh most disaster-prone country in the world by the Global Climate Risk Index 2021.<sup>32</sup> In Bangladesh, the main climate-related risks are tropical cyclones, tornadoes, floods, erosion of riverbanks and the shoreline, droughts, and landslides. Over the past five years, Bangladesh has experienced several natural hazards, including tropical cyclone Yaas (2021), Mocha (2023), and Remal (2024), as well as floods and landslides. Vulnerable groups, such as women, children, elderly, and people with disabilities, are disproportionately affected by natural hazards. Cyclone Remal, one of the most severe cyclones to hit Bangladesh in recent years, affected approximately 4.6 million people across 19 districts in May 2024, according to the Department of Disaster Management (DDM), under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR).<sup>33</sup> Cyclone Mocha in May 2023, affected a total of 429,337 Bangladeshi nationals across four districts (Cox's Bazar, Chattogram, Noakhali, and Feni), and 930,292 Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals' (FDMN)/Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, according to the DDM and MoDMR initial assessment.<sup>34</sup> Devastating floods from May-June 2022, severely affected 7.2 million people in nine north-eastern districts of Bangladesh,<sup>35</sup> causing loss of life, damage to infrastructure and other assets, and disrupted economic activities, among other.<sup>36</sup> The impact of these natural hazards, such as loss of housing, household assets, disruption of education, and diminished income, has intensified the crisis for the most vulnerable women, children, and gender-diverse groups.<sup>37</sup> Women's and vulnerable groups' mobility, access to services, as well as privacy, safety, and security, were also severely impacted.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, there is a heightened risk of GBV, due to stress caused by displacement, reduced access to safe shelter, and breakdown of social order.<sup>39</sup> Bangladesh has taken steps to significantly improve disaster preparedness - through improved early warning systems, volunteer mobilization for assistance, and community-

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Climate Vulnerability Index (CVI): Version 2*, 2023, <https://www.flipsnack.com/77777E5569B/climate-vulnerability-index-draft/full-view.html>, (accessed July 2024).

<sup>33</sup> Tropical Cyclone Remal - May 2024, *ReliefWeb*, <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/tc-2024-000083-bgd>, (accessed 26 June 2024).

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Bangladesh, *Cyclone Mocha Humanitarian Response- Situation Report*, 2023, [https://bangladesh.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/SitRep%201%20Bangladesh%20Cyclone%20Mocha%20Humanitarian%20Response\\_14%20May%202023.pdf](https://bangladesh.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/SitRep%201%20Bangladesh%20Cyclone%20Mocha%20Humanitarian%20Response_14%20May%202023.pdf), (accessed July 2024)

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Post-Disaster Needs Assessment: Floods 2022, 2023*,

[https://ddm.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/ddm.portal.gov.bd/page/b8246646\\_ee1d\\_409c\\_8705\\_6a670e156936/2023-03-12-07-10-e2326f304f9520077d827656e21cc6f8.pdf](https://ddm.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/ddm.portal.gov.bd/page/b8246646_ee1d_409c_8705_6a670e156936/2023-03-12-07-10-e2326f304f9520077d827656e21cc6f8.pdf), (accessed July 2024)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> UN Women, *Rapid Gender Analysis of Cyclone Remal*, 2024, <https://bangladesh.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/RGA%20Cyclone%20Remal%202024%20-%20FINAL%2020JUNE%202024.pdf>, (accessed August 2024).

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Post-Disaster Needs Assessment: Floods 2022, 2023*,

[https://ddm.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/ddm.portal.gov.bd/page/b8246646\\_ee1d\\_409c\\_8705\\_6a670e156936/2023-03-12-07-10-e2326f304f9520077d827656e21cc6f8.pdf](https://ddm.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/ddm.portal.gov.bd/page/b8246646_ee1d_409c_8705_6a670e156936/2023-03-12-07-10-e2326f304f9520077d827656e21cc6f8.pdf), (accessed July 2024)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

based disaster management, in addition to developing long-term policies and plans to mitigate, respond to, and adapt to climate change. These efforts have substantially reduced the number of human fatalities following a disaster. The intensity of recent natural hazards underscores the need to redouble and accelerate climate action.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.3. Challenges

Despite progress and notable achievements, Bangladesh has faced considerable challenges in implementing the BPfA over the past five years, compounded by the aforementioned setbacks. Despite the progressive constitution, providing equality before the law, and a multitude of strong laws and policies that uphold the rights of women, progress on key gender equality and women's empowerment is lagging.

Deeply ingrained gendered social norms and stereotypes perpetuate discrimination and inequality, with 91.67 per cent of people in Bangladesh holding at least two biases against women, leading to the persistence of harmful practices like child marriage, dowry, and GBV.<sup>41</sup> Alarming rates of GBV and child marriage persist. The most recent survey on violence against women was conducted in 2015, limiting a comprehensive overview and trend analysis of GBV in Bangladesh. Beyond GBV, the lack of sufficient and accessible gender statistics across sectors limits the ability to fully develop, monitor, and evaluate evidence-based gender equality policies, processes, and programmes, including monitoring progress against the SDGs and the allocation of necessary resources.

Bangladesh has made significant progress in reducing maternal mortality rates (MMR), which decreased from 648 per 100,000 live births in 1986<sup>42</sup> to 136 in 2023.<sup>43</sup> In 1994, merely 9.5 per cent of births were attended by skilled health personnel<sup>44</sup> which, in 2022, has increased to 61.5 per cent of births being assisted by a skilled attendant by international standards (physician, doctor, nurse, or midwife) and 24.9 per cent being attended by other trained skilled health personnel as per national standards.<sup>45</sup> However, disparities remain between rural and urban areas, as well as between poor and non-poor populations, and among various disadvantaged groups and geographic locations in accessing essential health services. Addressing structural challenges is crucial, particularly improving coordination between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> United Nations Development Programme, '2023 Gender Social Norms Index', 2023, <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/gsn202303.pdf>, (accessed July 2024).

<sup>42</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2022*, 2023, [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-02-12-09-14-e96115a9e06fa25854d494fc9ffbde52.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-02-12-09-14-e96115a9e06fa25854d494fc9ffbde52.pdf), (accessed August 2024).

<sup>43</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023 Key Findings*, Published in March 2024, [http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/SVRS/SVRS%202023%20Final%20Report\\_web.pdf](http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/SVRS/SVRS%202023%20Final%20Report_web.pdf), (accessed July 2024).

<sup>44</sup> General Economics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Sustainable Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report 2022*, 2022, [https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b\\_4dc1\\_4744\\_be4a\\_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book\\_compressed.pdf](https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b_4dc1_4744_be4a_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book_compressed.pdf), (accessed August 2024).

<sup>45</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2022*, Published in June 2023, [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-02-12-09-14-e96115a9e06fa25854d494fc9ffbde52.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-02-12-09-14-e96115a9e06fa25854d494fc9ffbde52.pdf), (accessed August 2024).



(MoHFW) and the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. Developing an effective urban health service delivery system with functional referrals between primary health care providers (local government institutions) and secondary/tertiary facilities is a key challenge that requires effective resolution.

In the education sector, dropout rates among female students remain high, particularly during the transition from primary to secondary education.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, there is a shortage of qualified teachers, lack of basic facilities, and limited financing for education. Children with disabilities, children in remote areas, and children from marginalized communities also encounter difficulties in accessing appropriate education, including inclusive infrastructure, resources, and support.

Women's participation in formal employment remains lower compared to men, with many women working in the informal sector where job security and benefits are limited. Women entrepreneurs face challenges such as access to information, technology, financial resources, and markets, among others. The disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, as evidenced by the TUS 2021, also restricts women's time and opportunity to engage in paid employment, pursue education, or participate in social and political activities, perpetuating traditional gender roles that confine women to the domestic sphere.

Bangladesh has hosted Rohingya Refugees/FDMNs in Cox's Bazar on humanitarian grounds since 2017. As of 2024, roughly 931,574 Rohingya refugees/FDMN reside in the refugee camps across Cox's Bazar and on Bhasan Char Island, over half of whom are women and girls (52%).<sup>47</sup> Bangladesh continues to bear responsibility to support the Rohingya refugees/FDMNs, including financial, social, security, and environmental,<sup>48</sup> with support from international and nation organizations. The Government of Bangladesh emerges as the largest donor of the humanitarian operations for the Rohingyas/FDMNs sheltered in the country. In 2022, it alone spent around USD 1.69 billion.<sup>49</sup> Women, girls, and boys, who make up the majority of the Rohingya refugee/FDMNs population, are particularly vulnerable to risks of abuse, exploitation, and GBV.<sup>50</sup> Ensuring access to basic needs (food, healthcare, shelter, etc.), safety and security, protection, and education remain the priority.

## **2.4. Priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls over the past five years**

Bangladesh has ratified several international conventions focused on gender equality and human rights, including, but not limited to, CEDAW, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and

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<sup>46</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, Ministry of Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Bangladesh Education Statistics 2023, 2024*, <https://banbeis.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/banbeis.portal.gov.bd/npfblock/Bangladesh%20Education%20Statistics%2023%20%281%29.pdf>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>47</sup> Government of Bangladesh and the United Nations in Bangladesh, *Joint Response Plan – Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis 2024*, 2024, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/JRP%202024.pdf>, (accessed July 2024).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions 100 (Equal Remuneration) and 111 (Discrimination in Employment and Occupation). In the past five years, Bangladesh dedicated efforts to outline its commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in key policy documents, strengthening their alignment with the international conventions ratified. These policy frameworks and action plans underscore Bangladesh's dedication to promoting gender equality and women's rights through systematic and comprehensive approaches

The integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in the overall development process is evident in the country's national five-year plans. The 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan 2020-2025, published in 2020, maintains a two-pronged approach with gender mainstreaming complemented by a dedicated gender equality strategy. With gender equality identified as a key objective to ensure equity and overcoming barriers to economic growth, poverty reduction and social development, the comprehensive gender strategy outlines an overarching vision of establishing "a country where men and women will have equal opportunities and rights and women will be recognized as equal contributors in economic, social and political development".<sup>51</sup> The plan refers to pursuing strategies and actions that not only enhance women's capabilities and access to resources and opportunities but also address the barriers in structures and institutions and aim at changing social norms and protecting their rights are critical to integrate within the plan. With greater emphasis on ensuring equality opportunities and rights, the plan outlines five key areas of or strategic objectives: 1) improve women's human capabilities, 2) increase women's economic participation and benefits, 3) enhance women's voice and remove constraints on women's agency, 4) enhance/strengthen the enabling environment for achieving gender equality, and 5) enhance the Mother and child benefit programme; and eight action areas: 1) increase access to human development opportunities, 2) enhance access to and control over diversified economic opportunities and resources, 3) increase participation and decision making at all levels, 4) establish a conducive legal and regulatory environment for gender equality, 5) provide infrastructure and communication services for women, 6) improve institutional capacity, accountability and oversight, 7) increase protection and resilience from crisis and shocks, and 8) promote positive social norms. Aligned with Agenda 2030, the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan 2020-2025 is mapped against the SDG indicators, with a total of ten indicators on gender equality, all of which are aligned with SDG 5 on gender equality. Beyond gender equality, the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan 2020-2025 maintains a strategy on social inclusion, rooted in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, which provides "equal rights and opportunities to all citizens irrespective of race, religion, caste, creed or profession".<sup>52</sup> The social inclusion strategy includes a dedicated approach for children, ethnic populations, Dalits and the extreme poor, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups, including sexual minority groups. The 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan has increased focus on addressing ignorance, stigma and discrimination of people living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), sex workers, and transgender people in Bangladesh, in addition.<sup>53</sup>

The 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan 2020-2025, aligned with the ratified international conventions, Agenda 2030, BpFA, and the NWDP 2011, and relevant sectoral action plans, has set the priorities and

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<sup>51</sup> General Economic Division, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *8th Five Year Plan 2020-2025*, 2020, <https://oldweb.lged.gov.bd/UploadedDocument/UnitPublication/1/1166/8FYP.pdf>, (accessed August 2024).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

policy directives for gender equality in Bangladesh over the past five years. Seven areas were also outlined as priorities in the Beijing+25 National Review Report.<sup>54</sup>

- Quality education, training, and life-long learning for women and girls;
- Eliminating violence against women and girls;
- Right to work (employment, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship) and rights at work;
- Gender-responsive social protection (e.g. universal health coverage, cash transfers, pensions)
- Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB)

In addition to the above, priority was also given to basic services and infrastructure (water, sanitation, hygiene, energy, transport, communication, etc.) and access to affordable quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

#### **2.4.1. Quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls**

The Bangladesh Government adopted the Education Sector Plan (ESP) for the fiscal years 2020-21 to 2024-2025 to guide the country's educational development over the medium-term. To execute the plan, the government has consistently allocated the necessary resources for the education sector, accounting for about 0.9 per cent of the total GDP and about 5.63 per cent of the total budget in the fiscal year 2023–24 which was one of the highest allocated sectors.<sup>55</sup>

With increase of student enrolment, the ratio of female students has been increasing gradually. In 2022 the proportion of female students enrolled was 55 per cent at primary level, 50 per cent at college level, and 36 per cent at the university level.<sup>56</sup> The total adult literacy rate witnessed significant improvement over the past years. As per the latest Population and Housing Census 2022, the literacy rate (five years and above) in the country has increased by 25.28 per centage points since 2011 and is now at 74.08 per cent. Similarly, the female literacy rate has increased by 25.68 per centage points since 2011 to 72.38 per cent in 2022.

The government's efforts have resulted in a significant increase in the enrolment of women in technical education. In 2010, the per cent enrolled rate for technical education was 1 per cent; it had risen to 15.79 per cent by 2022, where 27.01 per cent of students were female.<sup>57</sup> Through information technology training in the district and upazila levels, public awareness for the

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<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, '*Comprehensive National Review Report, for Beijing + 25: Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995*', Published in July 2022, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/Bangladesh-en.pdf>, (accessed August 2024).

<sup>55</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Progress Towards Equality: Gender Budget Report: 2024-2025, 2024*, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/98c2d08b\\_5cdc\\_4a69\\_9c5f\\_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20\(2024-25\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/98c2d08b_5cdc_4a69_9c5f_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20(2024-25).pdf), (accessed July 2024).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



development of human resources and information and communication technology education are being established at the grassroots level.

The number of institutions offering technical education and vocational training has also increased over the past five years. The total number of Technical and Vocational Institutions has increased from 6,885 in 2018 to 10,595 in 2022, whereas the number of public institutions has increased from 678 in 2018 to 1,028 in 2023. Women's participation in technical and vocational training (private and public) has improved from 24.76 per cent in 2018 to 29.53 per cent in 2023. However, women's participation in public institutions has only increased marginally from 20.44 per cent in 2018 to 20.66 per cent in 2023.<sup>58</sup>

The above progress was made possible by the numerous initiatives implemented by the Government of Bangladesh, with support from partners, over the past 5 years and more. Under the Fourth Primary Education Development Program (2018-2025), approximately 9,134 classrooms and 13,212 gender-segregated water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) blocks have been constructed and 9,068 water points have been installed.<sup>59</sup> To address the shortage of teachers in primary education, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) recruited 45,000 teachers in government primary schools in July 2022.<sup>60</sup> Beginning in 2023, the government has implemented a new curriculum for primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels, with the vision of providing scientific, modern and relevant education to students and enhancing the future academic potential of children.<sup>61</sup> Equitable distribution of primary education has also been strengthened through various programs, including stipends to 13 million students aimed at implementing proper sanitation facilities and supportive structures for children with special needs.<sup>62</sup> The Education Assistance Trust Fund awarded 8,329,838,860 scholarships to 15,529,799 graduate (pass) and comparable level students between 2013 and 2023, of which female students make up 75%.<sup>63</sup> In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, blended learning systems were introduced, and classes under the national curriculum were televised.

#### **2.4.2. Eliminating violence against women and girls**

Actions to eliminate violence against women and children are guided by the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2018–2030. Cases involving abuse against women are resolved quickly by tribunals, guaranteeing prompt justice administration. Service

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<sup>58</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, Ministry of Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Bangladesh Education Statistics 2023*, 2024, <https://banbeis.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/banbeis.portal.gov.bd/npfblock/Bangladesh%20Education%20Statistics%2023%20%281%29.pdf>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>59</sup> Asian Development Bank, Bangladesh: Supporting Fourth Primary Education Development Program - Project Page, n.d., <https://www.adb.org/projects/50192-002/main>, (accessed 26 June 2024)

<sup>60</sup> General Economic Division, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Mid-term Implementation Review of the Eight Five Year Plan*, 2023, <https://gedkp.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Mid-term-Implementation-Review-of-the-8th-Five-Year-Plan-Book.pdf>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024*, 2023, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

desks attended by trained female officers have been launched in all police stations, ensuring a safe and friendly environment where women can file their case without any fear. Between April 2020 and April 2023, 645,547 beneficiaries visited these service desks to obtain various services.<sup>64</sup> To support survivors, 67 one-stop crisis cells and 14 one-stop crisis centres are running across the country, two of which were established after 2020. Furthermore, to offer traumatized women and children long-term therapy services, nine trauma counselling clinics have been established in various districts. The National Legal Aid Services Organisation continued to offer free legal advice to survivors. Between 2018 and April 2023, these efforts have resulted in 96,278 cases being filed under ‘The Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Act’, 75,321 women and children receiving services from one stop crisis centres and one stop crisis cells, 8,968 women and children receiving multiple counselling sessions from counselling centres, and 4,795,836 women and children having received service from helpline ‘109’.<sup>65</sup> The largest government project on preventing violence against women, the ‘Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence against Women’ (4th phase), played a principle role in sustaining support and services to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls.

In 2020, Police Cyber Support for Women (PCSW), a cyber support service exclusively for women, was introduced. PCSW guarantees the privacy of victims' information while offering female victims of cybercrime essential legal and technological support.<sup>66</sup>

#### **2.4.3. Right to work and rights at work (e.g. gender pay gap, occupational segregation, career progression, job creation)**

Bangladesh formulated the comprehensive Bangladesh Labor Act 2006, which deals with the protection of the rights of the workers. To interpret and explain this Act, the Labor Rules were formulated in 2015. The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) has introduced some important amendments to the Labour Rules 2015 with effect from 1 September 2022.<sup>67</sup> Rule 361A has been introduced to prevent misconduct and sexual harassment against female workers. Rule 361A (Conduct towards Women) defines sexual harassment and supplements section 332 of the Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006. Sub-rule 1 specifies that no individual employed by an establishment may engage in sexual harassment of a woman or treat her in a way that is disrespectful of her dignity or modesty, or that could be seen as impolite or sexually explicit. Moreover, the definition of sexual harassment is provided in the explanation appended to sub-rule 1, which also states that twelve different behaviours would qualify as both sexual harassment and indecent and impolite behaviour for the purposes of this sub-rule. The new Rule also modified some aspects of maternity benefits. Firstly, a new clause has been added to rule 38 which states that the days that pass after the eight-week threshold will be recalculated in accordance with the Rules if a woman gives birth after the scheduled time. Secondly, a new rule 38A entitles a woman

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<sup>64</sup> Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, *4<sup>th</sup> Cycle Universal Periodic Review, ‘National Report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and 16/21, Bangladesh’*, General Assembly, Forty-fourth session, UN Doc A/HRC/WG.6/44/BGD/1, (1 September 2023),

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/178/07/pdf/g2317807.pdf>, (accessed August 2024)

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> M. S. Abrar, Amendment to the Labour Rules 2015: Safer Workplace for Women, *The Daily Star*, 16 September 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/amendment-the-labour-rules-2015-safer-workplace-women-3120696>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

to leave in case of a miscarriage. If a woman suffers a miscarriage before the scheduled date of going on maternity leave, she will be entitled to four weeks leave for health reasons. No deductions from wages will be made for such leave and it cannot be adjusted with any leave which is due to her. Finally, a new Rule 39A prescribes the method of calculation for maternity benefit and allows deductions to be made for her subscriptions to provident fund as per law. The amendment also imposes obligations on the employer under rule 78(1)(D)(viii) to set up a consultation arrangement in the health centre for female employees regarding the use of sanitary napkins, towels, or pads. Rule 103(1) includes a new clause requiring the employer to provide secure transportation if a woman is scheduled to work between 22:00 and 06:00.

To prevent sexual harassment at the workplace, Bangladesh has undertaken several measures. The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) under the MoLE toll free help line number 16357 has been introduced where workers can complain regarding any labour issues including sexual harassment and GBV in workplace. From July 2022 to June 2024 a total of 10,218 complaints have been received, of which 9,321 complaints were received through the online website, helpline, and emails.<sup>68</sup> During this period, 9,969 complaints were resolved. Various stakeholders, including DIFE Inspectors, Department of Labour employees, and factory workers, have increased capacity about implementation of Rule 361A and eradication of sexual harassment and GBV in workplaces following a variety of trainings, workshops, and awareness raising sessions conducted by the Department of Labour and ILO.

Bangladesh has updated the list of hazardous work at the workplace through a Gazette Notification on 29 April 2022, by including five new sectors. These are: (1) work related to fish drying, (2) street-based informal work, (3) work related to production, collection and transportation of bricks or collection and transportation of stone, (4) informal /local tailoring and clothing making and (5) garbage and waste management related work. In all the four sectors, women labour force participation is significant, and this is a risk factor for them in terms of health issue. In addition, the National Plan of Action (NPA) to Eliminate Child Labour (2021-2025) has been revised on 12 December 2021.

#### **2.4.4. Gender-responsive social protection (e.g. universal health coverage, cash transfers, pensions)**

Bangladesh has prioritized gender equality in social protection by increasing the social security budget, expanding pension coverage, and targeting vulnerable women and children. The social security budget has steadily increase, underscoring the government's strong commitment to poverty eradication and social security. To make the process more transparent and smoother, the government introduced direct cash transfer to the beneficiary through their mobile banking accounts.

In 2023, the government enacted the Universal Pension Management Act, expanding pension coverage to informal sector workers, where women are overrepresented. The "Suraksha" scheme specifically targets these workers, aiming to provide them with sustainable pension benefits.

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<sup>68</sup> Information obtained from Ministry of Labour and Employment in July 2024.

Additionally, the Universal Pension Management Rule, 2023 was formulated to ensure effective implementation of the Act.

The National Social Security Strategy Action Plan Phase-II 2021-2026, focuses on life-cycle-based social protection, targeting underprivileged and climate-vulnerable women and children. The government is also introduced online application with the support from the Union Digital Centre and the Info Lady to improve access to social protection for the marginalized women.

#### 2.4.5. Gender-responsive budgeting

Strategic resource allocation and equitable distribution across all sectors are necessary to support gender equality, and the implementation of the BPfA. The total national budget and gender budget allocation trend since FY 2009–2010 presents a consistent increase, from USD 23.1 billion in FY 2009-2010 to USD 230.35 billion in FY 2024-2025, rising by almost 10 times. In the past five years alone, the gender budget has increased by 34.11 per cent, on track to reach the target of 35 per cent, at minimum, by 2025.

Akin to the increase in the overall gender budget allocation, the budget allocation for MoWCA has increased every year with the exception of FY 2020-2021. Since the start of the fiscal year 2018-19, 322 budget, planning, and Women in Development (WID) focal point officers from 54 ministries as well as 89 representatives from civil society have received training on gender-responsive planning and budgeting under the Strengthening Gender Responsive Budgeting project (2017-2023) led by MoWCA.

*Table 2 Budget allocation for MoWCA over the past five years*

Serial	Financial Year	Allocation in BDT
1	2020-21	3742,04,30,000.00
2	2021-22	4103,59,52,000.00
3	2022-23	4290,79,41,000.00
4	2023-24	4755,03,39,000.00
5	2024-25	5222,20,00,000.00

Source: MOF and MoWCA official document dated August 12, 2023

The Finance Division of the government of Bangladesh has continued to release the Gender Budget Report on an annual basis, originally starting in 2009. The report explains the government's financing strategies and allocation for women's development, the number of women employed by the government by means of operation expenditure, and its efforts to promote women's rights and overall development. Additionally, it provides an overview of priority spending on women's welfare along with recent achievements by ministries and divisions. In FY 2024-2025 Finance Division made numerous improvements in the methodology of gender budget reporting in consultation with stakeholders. The Finance Division developed a gender finance module in

iBAS++ using the Gender Financed Tracking (GFT) model instead of the Recurrent, Capital, Gender, and Poverty (RCGP) model used in recent years. Additionally, the gender budget report was extended beyond the previously 44 ministries, now covering all 62 ministries, divisions, and institutions with direct and indirect involvement in gender issues. The Gender Budget Report prioritizes women's welfare and promotes gender equality throughout the budgeting process. Stakeholders from all walks of life can share ideas about government support for women's welfare and the various efforts the government has taken to reduce gender inequity. However, further assessment on utilization and effectiveness of budget allocation is needed.

## **2.5. Preventing discrimination and promoting the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls**

Bangladesh, as a constitutional democracy, continues to remain committed to upholding the rights of every citizen. Bangladesh has been implementing progressive policies to achieve a better society where everyone is treated equally and where fundamental human rights, the rule of law, equality, and justice are upheld. Bangladesh is committed to upholding the principles of equality and non-discrimination outlined in the constitution while safeguarding and advancing the rights of women, children, minorities, and other marginalized groups.

With an overall aim to end discrimination and protect the rights of marginalized sections of the society, Bangladesh has formulated an Anti-Discrimination Bill 2022 which is now in the parliamentary standing committee for further examination. The bill has been drafted in the light of constitutional provisions of equality and non-discrimination and international human rights treaties where Bangladesh is a party. The bill enumerates a list of discriminatory actions and provides administrative and judicial remedies against those actions. The list of discriminatory actions addresses the concerns and prejudices faced by the marginalized communities.

### **2.5.1. Persons with disabilities**

The Government of Bangladesh ratified CRPD in 2007 and ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRPD in 2008. The initial state party report of Bangladesh was submitted in 2017 and reviewed as part of the Committee's 600<sup>th</sup> and 601<sup>st</sup> meetings, with concluding observations adopted at the 617<sup>th</sup> meeting in 2022. Bangladesh adopted the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, in 2013, and the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Rules in 2015. A Neuro-Developmental Disability Protection Trust Act was adopted in 2013, complemented by a strategic action plan for neuro-developmental disorders 2016–2030.

As per the Census in 2022, 1.43 per cent of the population have at least one disability, constitution 2,361,604 persons, of which 1.23 per cent are female and 1.63 per cent are male.<sup>69</sup> BBS conducted the first stand-alone nationwide survey on the persons with disabilities in 2021, the National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (NSPD) 2021, to help to make inclusive short and long-term

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<sup>69</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Population and Housing Census 2022: Preliminary Report, 2022*, [https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe\\_cfef\\_4811\\_af97\\_594b6c64d7c3/PHC\\_Preliminary\\_Report\\_\(English\)\\_August\\_2022.pdf](https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_(English)_August_2022.pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

development plans and strategies for the persons with disabilities and to monitor the implementation of the CRPD and Agenda 2030.

Seven social security programmes specifically target persons with disabilities, benefitting 3.2 million persons.<sup>70</sup> These include allowances, education stipends, and support centres and services. Special training programs have been introduced to prepare women with disabilities for employment, with a focus on ICT and digital literacy. The government operates 74 schools for children with intellectual and other disabilities, 8 schools for people with speech and hearing disabilities, and 5 schools for kids with visual disabilities. Through a program implemented in a few schools throughout 64 districts, the government is able to offer integrated education to children with disabilities in addition to students without disabilities. During public exams, students with autism and neurodevelopmental disorders are granted an additional half-hour, and teachers or parents are permitted to accompany them if needed. Moreover, students with disabilities receive necessary accommodations without cost, such as braille textbooks.<sup>71</sup>

### 2.5.2. Ethnic minorities

Ethnic minorities constitute approximately one per cent of the population of Bangladesh.<sup>72</sup> Bangladesh has formulated legislative and policy measures for the protection of minorities and harmonious coexistence in the society, including affirmative action, such as quotas for admission to education (certain colleges and universities) and government jobs.<sup>73</sup> To protect and advance the cultures of ethnic minorities, the government has built ten educational and cultural institutes. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) area, the government is dedicated to implementing the CHT Peace Accord, including defending ethnic minorities' land rights. To this end, the Chittagong Hill District Land Dispute Resolution Commission has been reconstituted.<sup>74</sup> The Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs is continuously implementing projects to advance socio-economic development, such as a solar power project and crop cultivation projects engaging women in collaboration with other ministries.

Under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the government launched a project in 2022 called 'Increasing Religious Harmony and Awareness' which aims to foster a proper and peaceful understanding of religion among the populace.<sup>75</sup> The objective of the project is to promote a culture

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<sup>70</sup> Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Implementation of National Social Security Strategy of Bangladesh – Dashboard*, n.d., <https://mne.socialprotection.gov.bd/>, (accessed 20 June 2024)

<sup>71</sup> Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, *4<sup>th</sup> Cycle Universal Periodic Review, 'National Report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and 16/21, Bangladesh'*, General Assembly, Forty-fourth session, UN Doc A/HRC/WG.6/44/BGD/1, (1 September 2023),

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/178/07/pdf/g2317807.pdf>, (accessed August 2024)

<sup>72</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Population and Housing Census 2022: Preliminary Report*, 2022,

[https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe\\_cfef\\_4811\\_af97\\_594b6c64d7c3/PHC\\_Preliminary\\_Report\\_\(English\)\\_August\\_2022.pdf](https://sid.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/sid.portal.gov.bd/publications/01ad1ffe_cfef_4811_af97_594b6c64d7c3/PHC_Preliminary_Report_(English)_August_2022.pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>73</sup> Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, *4<sup>th</sup> Cycle Universal Periodic Review, 'National Report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and 16/21, Bangladesh'*, General Assembly, Forty-fourth session, UN Doc A/HRC/WG.6/44/BGD/1, (1 September 2023),

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/178/07/pdf/g2317807.pdf>, (accessed August 2024)

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ministry of Religious affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Increasing Religious Harmony and Awareness*, n.d., <https://harmonyprojectmora.gov.bd/#/user>, (accessed 31 July 2024)



of peace, tolerance, and inclusiveness through education and cultural activism involving women, youth, civil society, community, and faith leaders.

### **2.5.3. Socially marginalized and vulnerable groups**

The government continues to expand its efforts to support socially marginalized and vulnerable groups, with an emphasis on poverty alleviation, social protection, economic empowerment, and ensuring access to basic services. The budget and reach of the Old Age Allowance program has steadily increased, from 4.4 million beneficiaries in FY2019-2020 to 6 million beneficiaries in FY2024-2025.<sup>76</sup> Akin, support to widows and destitute women has increased. Additionally, social protection programmes provide support to Hijra, Bede and other marginalized communities, including tea labourers, coastal communities and those residing in climate vulnerable areas.<sup>77</sup>

## **2.6. Tackling crises and preventing their negative impact on progress for women and girls**

Amidst the multifaceted challenges that women and girls face globally, effectively tackling crises and mitigating their adverse effects is crucial for ensuring sustained progress and empowerment. Concerted efforts by governments, NGOs, CSOs, private sector, and communities have proven effective in responding to crises, significantly reducing the long-term impacts on women and girls and the implementation of the BPfA.

### **2.6.1. Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

During the pandemic, women and girls faced increasing incidents of violence. According to the preliminary results of the COVID-19 impact survey conducted by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in March 2020, there was a notable surge in reports of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Bangladesh at the inception of the pandemic. In response to the rise in SGBV, the Government of Bangladesh, alongside NGOs and CSOs, mobilized to respond to the needs of women and girls.

For example, the Family Planning Association of Bangladesh (FPAB), an IPPF member organization, quickly adapted its services to provide door-to-door services and hotline support to women and girls in the country who required crucial sexual and reproductive health and SGBV care. From 21 FPAB branches, medical officers and counsellors offered support for sexual and reproductive health as well as specialized help for GBV issues affecting women and girls. FPAB also handled GBV cases through the government helpline as well and referred survivors to government hospitals for testing and sample collection.

The government appointed 10,000 physicians, nurses, and medical technologists to improve the care of COVID-19 patients. For the purpose of updating information about the coronavirus, the MoHFW established the official website [www.corona.gov.bd](http://www.corona.gov.bd). Additionally, One Health Window 16263 was created for regular online doctor contact. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the National

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<sup>76</sup> Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Implementation of National Social Security Strategy of Bangladesh – Dashboard*, n.d., <https://mnc.socialprotection.gov.bd/>, (accessed 20 June 2024)

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

Toll-Free Helpline 109 was available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24/7). Online mental health support was offered by MoWCA’s clinical psychologists.

Moreover, women entrepreneurs were also disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to preexisting vulnerabilities. In a study of 589 women-led cottage, micro, small and medium sized enterprises (CMSMEs) and 1,000 informal sector workers, two-thirds of the entrepreneurs (65%) reported having no income, while one third (33%) of them reported their businesses were not in operation during the pandemic. Overall, women entrepreneurs’ personal income was reduced by 67 per cent.<sup>78</sup> In response the government provided a stimulus amounting BDT 2,000 billion (USD 1.7 billion) for CMSMEs of which five per cent was allocated specifically to women entrepreneurs.<sup>79</sup>

During the pandemic, the Courts could not function due to lockdown and distancing provisions. The government promulgated ‘the Usage of Information and Communication Technology by Court Ordinance 2020 allowing courts to hold trials digitally. It was reported that in the one year (2020-2021) of the operation of virtual courts, the Bangladesh judiciary disposed of more than 215,000 bail petitions.<sup>80</sup> The virtual courts ensured that the judiciary remain functional during lockdowns and restrictions, and enabled women to access the legal services, despite mobility restrictions.

Other notable initiatives undertaken by the government to tackle the COVID-19 crisis include:<sup>81</sup>

- Provision of cash relief for 31 million people.
- Social Safety Net Programmes for 11 million people (most of them women and children)
- Provision of maternity allowance (BDT 800), apart from materiality leave for 6 months with full benefit.
- Stimulus package including food grains for 50 million people; festival food grants for 10 million people; BDT 50 billion for agricultural subsidies; and special cash provision to vulnerable families.

## 2.6.2. Climate Crisis

Apart from COVID-19, the climate crisis and natural hazards pose a serious challenge to gender equality. Bangladesh ranked seventh in the Climate Risk Index 2021 based on data from 2000 to 2019. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projection report (2022), Bangladesh is at the risk losing 2 and 9 percent of annual GDP by the mid and end of the century,

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<sup>78</sup> Brac, *Situation of Women CMSME Entrepreneurs and Informal Sector Workers: A rapid assessment and quest for recovery from losses induced by COVID-19 pandemic*, 2020, <https://www.brac.net/program/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Situation-of-Women-CMSME-Entrepreneurs-and-Informal-Sector-Workers.pdf>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>79</sup> F. Khatun, Women’s access to stimulus packages and post Covid-19 gender equality, *The Daily Star*, 1 September 2020, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/macro-mirror/news/womens-access-stimulus-packages-and-post-covid-19-gender-equality-1953693>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>80</sup> J. U. Ahmed and A. Masharf, Operation of Virtual Courts: Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Access to Justice in Bangladesh, *University of Asia Pacific Law Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021, p.01-17, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358976236\\_Operation\\_of\\_Virtual\\_Courts\\_Impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_Pandemic\\_on\\_Access\\_to\\_Justice\\_in\\_Bangladesh](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358976236_Operation_of_Virtual_Courts_Impact_of_COVID-19_Pandemic_on_Access_to_Justice_in_Bangladesh), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>81</sup> UN Women (Bangladesh), n.d., <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/65/MS%20Inputs%20Review%20Theme/Bangladesh.pdf>, (accessed 27 July 2024)



respectively, due to climate change. The report further indicated that Bangladesh is on course to lose 17 percent of its land and 30 per cent of its food production by 2050. About two thirds of the country's land area is prone to river and rainwater flooding, and its coastlines are exposed to storm surges and tidal flooding. Consequently, the country is particularly vulnerable to sea level rise, seasonal flooding and waterlogging, droughts, river and coastal erosion, and other climate hazards. Such natural disasters disproportionately affect the women and girls of the country due to social norms and systemic gender inequalities.

Bangladesh has been integrating a gender-sensitive approach into climate change policies and action plans, including Vision 2041; the Eighth Five Year Plan 2020-2025; the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), 2009; and the Climate Change and Gender Action Plan, 2013 (updated in 2024), the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan Decade 2030 and the Delta Plan 2100. However, despite policy interventions the practical challenges remain in addressing the impacts of climate change. The Gender Equality and Climate Change Assessment Report in Bangladesh (2022) highlights some challenges that include limited capacity to mainstream gender into national and local policies, programmes, and actions; lack of investment in gender-responsive actions; limited access of women's organizations; and low numbers of women in decision-making.

## **2.7. Priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls for the next five years**

Promoting gender equality remains a key priority agenda for the Government of Bangladesh as articulated in the comprehensive policy frameworks, such as the 8th Five Year Plan, the National Women Development Policy 2011 and sectoral national plans and strategies. With an overall vision of establishing “a country where men and women will have equal opportunities and rights, and women will be recognized as equal contributors in economic, social, and political development”,<sup>82</sup> Bangladesh continues to be a regional leader on gender equality. The Government of Bangladesh identifies the following priorities, among others, for accelerating progress for women and girls:

- Quality education, training, and life-long learning for women and girls
- Eliminating violence against women and girls
- Access to affordable quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights
- Promoting gender equality as part of environmental sustainability, climate change adaptation, and mitigation strategies
- Gender-responsive budgeting

### **2.7.1. Quality education, training, and life-long learning for women and girls**

The government has maintained a steadfast position on the prioritization of quality education for everyone, with a focus on ensuring equitable and high-quality education that leads to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Beyond the 8th Five Year Plan 2020-2025, the government has

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<sup>82</sup> General Economic Division, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *8th Five Year Plan 2020-2025*, 2020, <https://oldweb.lged.gov.bd/UploadedDocument/UnitPublication/1/1166/8FYP.pdf>, (accessed August 2024).

adopted the ambitious targets aligned with SDG 4 on quality education for all, with emphasis on equitable, inclusive, and accessible quality education. The Perspective Plan 2041 (PP2041), a continuation of the Perspective Plan 2021 outlines the country's journey from 'digital' to 'smart' with a focus on data-centric design, human-centric experiences, and digitalization.<sup>83</sup> The PP2041 articulates a comprehensive strategy on education and training, with specific initiatives to address gender gaps, including through scholarships for women, establishing public colleges for women at district level, addressing child marriage, encouraging women's participation in vocational training, among other. The existing sectoral policies and plans, such as the National Education Policy 2010, the National Skills Development Policy 2011, and the Strategic Plan for Higher Education in Bangladesh 2018-2030, also set the framework for progress on education. With over two-thirds of Bangladesh's population in the workforce, and experience a 'demographic dividend', skill development and employment generation, particularly in the ICT sector, are high priorities.

In the 2023 SDG Statement of Commitments, the Government of Bangladesh outlined nine commitments related to education of which one is to achieve gender parity in schools and improve inclusion of people with disabilities and another to implement a new, competency-based curriculum that promotes gender equality and quality education. The other commitments to education include universal literacy and primary education completion; expansion of pre-primary education; teacher recruitment and training; improved learning environments; improved quality of higher education; establish Bangladesh National Qualification Framework; and strengthen industry linkages in technical and vocational education and training.<sup>84</sup> The government also committed to train 75,000 women on various topics related to ICT by 2032 in order to increase women's participation in the ICT sector to 25 per cent by 2026 and 50 per cent by 2041.<sup>85</sup>

### **2.7.2. Eliminating violence against women and girls**

The Government of Bangladesh will continue to prioritize a range of initiatives aimed at ending GBV. This includes enacting laws, creating behaviour change awareness, preventing early marriage, ensuring child rights, improving the socio-economic status of women, creating safe public spaces, and providing multi-sectoral support and services to the survivors of GBV. These efforts aim to create a safe and inclusive society for all individuals, particularly women and children. The National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2018-2030, with a costed annualized results framework, provides the strategic direction for planning, identifying resource gaps, and guiding resource allocations and implementation.

The Government of Bangladesh is committed to removing all discriminatory provisions in laws and policies, in consistency with CEDAW and ensuring their implementation. The amendment of the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Rules of 2013 has been initiated to criminalize domestic violence in Bangladesh. The implementation of the High Court Directive 2009 will be prioritised to prevent sexual harassment at workplaces and educational institutions by establishing

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<sup>83</sup> General Economic Division, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Making Vision 2041 a Reality: Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021-2041*, 2020, <https://oldweb.lged.gov.bd/uploadeddocument/unitpublication/1/1049/vision%202021-2041.pdf>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>84</sup> Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *SDG Summit 2023: Bangladesh Country Commitments*, 2023, <https://sdgs.un.org/national-commitments-sdg-transformation/22071>, (accessed 15 September 2024).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

and functionalising the complaint committees. Enactment of a comprehensive act on sexual harassment prevention and protection for workplaces and educational institutions is critical.

Ending child marriage remains a priority, and the Government of Bangladesh has reiterated its commitment to completely eliminate child marriage by 2041 (SDG 5.3.1). To this end, the National Action Plan to End Child Marriage 2018-2030 consolidates the commitments and actions of the government until 2030. Ending child marriage requires actions across multiple areas and sectors, and the full enforcement of legislation and implementation of plans and programmes.

Comprehensive quality essential services must be available to survivors of GBV. Efforts will be made to further expand services across the country, including One-Stop Crisis Centres and coordination among the GBV service providers must be improved to ensure gender-responsive essential services. The Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) will reconstruct and establish shelters and homes to increase the availability and quality of essential services. The government will also focus on improving the socio-economic status of women to lower vulnerability to violence. Financial support combined with skills training will be prioritised for women, including support for female migrant workers abroad.

The Government of Bangladesh has developed and operationalized the National Protocol on Health Sector Response to GBV by building the capacity of health service providers, ensuring availability of required support at local level health facilities and operational plans under the country's forthcoming 5th Health, Population, and Nutrition Sector Program (July 2024 to June 2029). Front-line health service providers, including midwives, have been trained to provide mental health and psychosocial support and services (MHPSS). The Government of Bangladesh has agreed to incorporate MHPSS in the training curriculum for community health service providers and midwives of the MoHFW.

### **2.7.3. Access to affordable quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights**

Bangladesh is committed to attaining SDG 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being of all people, with a vision of universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030.<sup>86</sup> With this ambition, the PP2041 outlines the strategies and activities focused on improvements in health service delivery for increasing access to, and quality of care, and improving equity along with financial protection. To achieve UHC by 2032, the government is implementing the Health Care Financing Strategy 2012–2032 that refers to safeguarding the healthcare expenses of the impoverished population. The government is also exploring policy options to increase the fiscal space for health and expand coverage while improving service quality and availability. The focus is on customized and context specific policy adjustments for progress toward UHC.

Complementary to the priorities laid out in the PP2041 on health, Bangladesh will continue to prioritize the implementation of sector specific policies, plans, strategies, and programmes, including specific actions to advance women, girls, and marginalized communities, access to health services. The Bangladesh National Strategy for Maternal Health 2019-2030, implemented

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<sup>86</sup> General Economic Division, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Mid-term Implementation Review of the Eight Five Year Plan, 2023*, <https://gedkp.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Mid-term-Implementation-Review-of-the-8th-Five-Year-Plan-Book.pdf>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

under MoHFW, upholds principles of rights and equity, acknowledging that efforts needed for strengthening the health system and enhancing managerial capacity at national and local levels, and calls for co-operation among other government sectors as well as the private sector. The Strategy is aligned to global commitments and initiatives such as the United Nations Secretary General’s Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health and its accompanying ‘Every Woman Every Child’ initiative, the ‘Every Newborn Action Plan’, the ‘Ending Preventable Maternal Mortality’ initiative, and is complementary to ‘A Promise Renewed’, a global effort to accelerate action on maternal, newborn and child survival. The National Adolescent Health Strategy 2017-2030 has identified four priority thematic areas of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, violence against adolescents, adolescent nutrition, and mental health of adolescents. The National Mental Health Policy 2022 also identifies several actions, include coordination, financing, organization of services, academic curriculum, mental health promotion, prevention of mental health conditions, rehabilitation, development of a nonpharmacological approach at all levels of the health system, mental health services for vulnerable populations, standardized skilled human resources, e-mental health services, evidence-based research and guidelines, neurodevelopmental disabilities, suicide prevention, regulatory body for mental health professionals, family-based training for providing mental health support. The long-standing Health Population and Nutrition Sector Program (HPNSP), adopting a series of multiyear strategies and programmes, will continue. The 5th HPNSP (2024-2029)<sup>87</sup> focuses on prevention, control, and treatment of non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health, primary healthcare, urban health, medical waste management, nutrition, reducing out-of-pocket expenditure, pandemic preparedness, introducing functional referral system, and disease burden due to climate change.

#### **2.7.4. Promoting gender equality as part of environmental sustainability, climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies**

Bangladesh, as the seventh most climate vulnerable country, has been actively engaged in climate action and environmental protection addressing gender equality. Since the adoption of the BCCSAP in 2009, providing a comprehensive approach to addressing climate change, the country has further articulated its approach in a series of policies and strategies, such as the Mujib Climate Prosperity plan 2022-2041, the National Adaptation Plan 2023-2050, the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100, etc. Ensuring socially inclusive adaptation, including for women, youth, and people with disabilities, are guiding principles in these frameworks. The updated CCGAP, published in March 2024, reaffirms the government’s commitment to sustainable development in tackling the effects of climate change, recognizing its disproportionate impact on women, girls, and marginalized groups. Moving forward, priority is placed on the implementation of the CCGAP, as per the concrete steps and measurable progress indicators outlined in the plan.

The PP2041 states that in order to make the nation a high-income country by 2041, the energy and natural resources sectors must develop sustainably and underscores the contribution of women in achieving that milestone. The Ministry of Water Resources is prioritizing women’s fully and equally participation in the mainstream of socio-economic development. The ministry reaffirmed in the NAP-NWDP 2021-2030 this commitment. To promote gender equality and empower women in water management, it is crucial to involve them actively in stakeholder meetings and

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<sup>87</sup> S. Saif and T. Tajmim, Govt plans increased funding for healthcare, aims to improve quality, accessibility, *The Business Standard*, 19 May 2024, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/health/govt-plans-increased-funding-healthcare-aims-improve-quality-accessibility-854731>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

planning sessions, as well as in the collection of user feedback. Engaging women in these processes ensures their perspectives are considered, leading to more inclusive and effective management strategies. Additionally, leasing water bodies to women for fish cultivation can provide significant economic opportunities and support their financial independence. Expanding employment opportunities for women in infrastructure construction not only supports their economic empowerment but also helps build essential community assets. Furthermore, arranging livelihood support through income-generating training and credit for women affected by river erosion and natural disasters can help them recover and thrive in the face of adversity, reinforcing their resilience and economic stability. The Energy and Mineral Resources Division of the government aims to undertake a project for enhancing adaptive capacities of coastal communities, especially women, to cope with climate change induced salinity. The project aims to empower target communities, particularly women, as ‘change-agents’ to plan, implement, and manage resilient livelihoods and drinking water solutions. It will enhance the adaptive capacities of these communities in case of worsening impacts of climate-change induced salinity on their freshwater resources which in turn adversely affect livelihood and drinking water requirements. The project contributes towards the Government of Bangladesh’s achievement of priorities outlined in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and its climate change strategies.

### **2.7.5. Gender-responsive budgeting**

The vision for GRB in Bangladesh is driven by the constitutional mandate, which ensures equal opportunity for all citizens (Article 19[1]), and prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, birthplace, and gender (Article 28[1]). The government’s commitment to GRB is evident by the steady increase of the gender budget, on track to reach the target of 35 per cent, at minimum, by 2025.<sup>88</sup> The Government of Bangladesh remains committed to further strengthening GRB as a powerful tool to promote gender equality.

The Finance Division publishes the Gender Budget Report on an annual basis, now covering all ministries/divisions of the government (FY 2024-2025), a significant increase from the 4 ministries covered in FY 2009-2010.<sup>89</sup> In FY 2024-2025, the Finance Division developed a new gender finance module in iBAS++ using the GFT model instead of the RCGP module used in previous years. Expanding on the existing three thematic areas of Women Empowerment and Enhancing Social Status, Economic Participation and Equality, and Increasing Women’s Effective Access to Public Services, the GFT model has introduced two new thematic areas focused on Education, Health, and Wellbeing for Women Development; and Not Gender Relevant. The Gender Budget Report will remain a critical practice undertaken by the Finance Division, serving as an essential knowledge base for stakeholders to foster greater involvement in policy development and monitoring of gender-related initiatives. To respond to the gaps identified in health and education sectors in the Gender Budget Report FY 2024-2025, the government will form several committees consisting the lead ministry/division, associate ministries/divisions, academicians, representatives

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<sup>88</sup> Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *SDG Summit 2023: Bangladesh Country Commitments*, 2023, <https://sdgs.un.org/national-commitments-sdg-transformation/22071>, (accessed 15 September 2024).

<sup>89</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *Progress Towards Equality: Gender Budget Report: 2024-2025*, 2024, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/98c2d08b\\_5cdc\\_4a69\\_9c5f\\_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20\(2024-25\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/98c2d08b_5cdc_4a69_9c5f_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20(2024-25).pdf), (accessed July 2024).

from civil society, etc. to review progress and identify necessary action to move forward, with a monitoring and evaluation framework.<sup>90</sup>

Building on the ‘Strengthening Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Bangladesh’ project (2017-2023), implemented by MoWCA efforts will continue to strengthen the government’s capacity for GRB to ensure adequate and effective financing for gender equality. The government will continue to prioritize quality throughout the budget cycle, with emphasis on using the national action plans and annual performance agreement as reference points when allocating resource for gender equality targeted and mainstreamed actions; institutionalizing rigorous monitoring of GRB, including in audits; and ensure availability of sufficient technical support and training for effective implementation of GRB.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, the use of GRB tools will be ensured at all the local government level by enhancing capacity of the institutions.

### 2.7.6. Poverty and inequality targets

In addition to the abovementioned five priorities for the next five years, the Government of Bangladesh, in its SDG Statement of Commitments in 2023, has outlined its national benchmarks for reducing poverty and inequality by 2030. In the coming five years, Bangladesh will continue to make progress against the targets by investing in health, education, employment, and more. The poverty and inequality targets for 2027 and 2030 are as follows.<sup>92</sup>

*Table 3 Bangladesh's poverty and inequality targets*

Indicators	Baseline (FY 2022)	Target (FY 2027)	Target (FY 2030)
Moderate Poverty, %	18.70	11.0	7.2
Extreme Poverty, %	5.60	3.2	2.6
Inequality (Gini coefficient-income)	0.499	0.490	0.485

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> General Economic Division, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *8th Five Year Plan 2020-2025*, 2020, <https://oldweb.lged.gov.bd/UploadedDocument/UnitPublication/1/1166/8FYP.pdf>, (accessed August 2024).

<sup>92</sup> Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *SDG Summit 2023: Bangladesh Country Commitments*, 2023, <https://sdgs.un.org/national-commitments-sdg-transformation/22071>, (accessed 15 September 2024).



## Section Three: Progress across the 12 critical areas of concern

The 12 major areas of concern covered by the BPfA are discussed in this section along with their respective progress. The 12 critical areas of concern have been clustered into six overarching dimensions, highlighting the alignment of the BPfA with the 2030 Agenda.

### 3.1 Inclusive development, shared prosperity, and decent work

**Critical areas of concern:** Women and poverty, Women and the economy, Human rights of women, The girl child.

#### 3.1.1 Advancing gender equality in the world of work

The Constitution of Bangladesh states that all citizens are equal before the law (Article 27), that women shall have equal rights to those of men in all areas of spheres of the State and of public life (Article 28[2]), including equal opportunity in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic (Article 29[2]). The National Women's Development Policy 2011 and its National Action Plan provide a base for government action to promote gender equality, and the 8th Five Year Plan integrates gender equality issues across several sectors.

In Bangladesh, the female labour force participation rate has increased over the past five years. As per BBS, the female workforce has increased to 42.68 per cent in 2022, up from 36.3 per cent five years ago. Informal employment dominates the labour market, with 84.9 per cent of the employed population engaged in informal employment.<sup>93</sup> In fact, 96.6 per cent of the employed female population aged 15 and older is in informal employment, constituting 24.02 million women, with only 3.4 per cent in formal employment.<sup>94</sup> It is worth mentioning that a large number of females are working in the country's readymade garment industry (RMG) which contributes significantly to the economy of Bangladesh. In 2021, the per centage of female workforce in RMG was 53.65 per cent.<sup>95</sup>

To advance gender equality in the world of work, Bangladesh has taken steps to strengthen laws, policies, and plans, as well as implemented several projects, programmes, and initiatives. The government formulated the National Employment Policy 2022 which identifies several obstacles to the development of skilled labour, such as the lack of public and private initiatives. The policy's objectives are to build a trained labour force that can compete globally, ensure a society free from poverty and unemployment, and encourage both men and women to pursue fulfilling careers. The

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<sup>93</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Labour Force Survey 2022 Bangladesh*, 2023  
[https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-10-25-07-38-4304abd7a3f3d8799fbc59ff91007b1.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-10-25-07-38-4304abd7a3f3d8799fbc59ff91007b1.pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> M. Munn, Women's participation in RMG sector declining, *The Financial Express*, 8 March 2024,  
<https://today.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/special-issues/intl-womens-day-2024/womens-participation-in-rmg-sector-declining-1709837071>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

PP2041, published in 2020, also sets the intention to increase women's labour force involvement in formal sector jobs as well as their engagement in skill development programmes. These actions are intended to be taken in the short- to medium-term, until 2031. Other notable examples are outlined below

**The Bangladesh Labour (amended) Act 2023:** The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 was amended in 2023, bringing labour regulations closer to compliance with the International Labour standards. The Bangladesh Labour Act (Amendment) 2023 has increased the length of maternity leave from 112 to 120 days. Women workers can now take the full 120 days of maternity leave before or after childbirth, instead of the previous arrangement of splitting the time evenly between the two. Other noteworthy amendments include the provision The Labour Law Support Cell also offers legal services to women who perform a variety of manual labour, including those who work in the apparel industry. In the fiscal year 2023-2024, the total number of workers receiving maternity benefits was 8855 and the total amount of benefit was BDT 333.72 million.<sup>96</sup>

**Overseas Employment and Migration (amendment) Act 2023:** Bangladesh amended the Overseas Employment and Migration Act in 2023. The amendment of the original Act (Act No. XLVIII of 2013) provides provision for the government to take necessary measures, including special financial and other welfare programs, to ensure the respect, dignity, rights, safety, and security of women migrant workers at all levels of the immigration process and in overseas workplaces. The amended Act puts renewed emphasis on female employment opportunities, which has seen an increase over the past ten years, with slight disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of all migrant workers from Bangladesh in the past ten years, 11.8 per cent were women, and 88.2 per cent were men (2014-2024).<sup>97</sup> According to the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, women's international out-migration rate (per 1,000 population) has increased from 0.89 in 2019 to 1.44 in 2023.<sup>98</sup> Provisions in the amended Act have also been added to recognize the role of sub-agents and representatives and bring them under the accountability framework to ensure safe and orderly migration. To support migrant workers, including women migrant workers, legal assistance, compensation to deceased workers from foreign employers, provision of scholarships to meritorious children, assistance to endangered workers, health facilities, work site inspection, repatriation and burial of deceased workers, financial assistance to families of deceased workers etc. services are being provided.

**Women in ICT Flagship initiatives - She Power Project and Her Power Project:** The “She Power Project - Sustainable Development for Women through ICT” was introduced in 2018, with the aim to create a competent female workforce and empower women entrepreneurs, startups, and women working in technology in Bangladesh. The project provided training to 4,000 women as Freelance to Entrepreneur, 4,000 women as IT Service Provider, and 2,500 women as Call Centre

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<sup>96</sup> Information obtained from Ministry of Labour and Employment in July 2024.

<sup>97</sup> Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Statistical reports*, n.d., <https://old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>, (accessed 20 June 2024)

<sup>98</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023: Key Findings, 2024, [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-03-24-05-41-69f984d80716a740d40f7044bea63285.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-03-24-05-41-69f984d80716a740d40f7044bea63285.pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)



Agent. The “She Power Project - Sustainable Development for Women through ICT Frontline Initiative” is ICT” was introduced in 2018, with the aim to create a competent female workforce and empower women entrepreneurs, startups, and women working in technology in Bangladesh. ICT), with phase two running from 2022 to 2025. Launched under the "Digital Bangladesh" vision, the project aims to increase women's participation in the ICT sector, enhance their digital skills, and create more employment opportunities for them in this field. In total, 10,000 women entrepreneurs are being created through She Power and Her Power projects. Around 6,700 participants successfully completed the project, got a 4-month paid internship opportunity and 3,000 women out of them have been employed as freelancers.<sup>99</sup> The "Her Power Project - Empowerment of Women Through ICT Frontline Initiative” is another initiative by the Government of Bangladesh focused on empowering women through Information and Communication Technology (ICT), with phase two running from 2022 to 2025. Launched under the "Digital Bangladesh" vision, the project aims to increase women's participation in the ICT sector, enhance their digital skills, and create more employment opportunities for them in this field. In total, 10,000 women entrepreneurs are being created through She Power and Her Power projects.

**Transform backward youth into industrial workers to increase industrial productivity:** <sup>100</sup>

The Department of Labour (DoL) under the MoLE has been implementing a project named “Transform backward youth into industrial workers to increase industrial productivity” (TBIP) since 2023.<sup>101</sup> This project, running until 2026, aims to create partnerships with 500 industries to generate employment and to recognize the experience of 5,000 industrial workers in various industries. From October 2023 to June 2024, the project has provided training to 3,480 participants. Of those trained, 1,169 women have been employed in different sectors.<sup>102</sup> The project has also target for job placement of 4,800 young women in different sectors by June 2026. The targeted young women will get training for 3 months from the project.

**Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments Gender Roadmap (2020-2030):**

DIFE under MoLE developed a Gender Roadmap for gender mainstreaming in the short, medium, and long term (2020-2030). The Gender Roadmap focuses on three broad levels, the institutional and policy level; collaboration and partnerships; and operational management, encompassing an output-oriented action plan. In 2023-24 the DIFE conducted 48,472 inspections to ensure decent working conditions for men and women.<sup>103</sup> Through these inspections, 290,832 violations were detected, and 1,386 cases were filed in the labour court. Currently there are 440 inspectors including 82 women inspectors engaged in labour inspection. Considering the number of factories and establishments in the country, the government is gradually increasing the number of inspectors.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> General Economic Division, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *Mid-term Implementation Review of the Eight Five Year Plan*, 2023, <https://gedkp.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Mid-term-Implementation-Review-of-the-8th-Five-Year-Plan-Book.pdf>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>100</sup> Information obtained from Ministry of Labour and Employment in July 2024.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Information obtained from Ministry of Labour and Employment in July 2024.

**Joyeeta Tower:** The Joyeeta Foundation, a non-profitable and autonomous venture under MoWCA, provides financing and support to women entrepreneurs, with the mission of fostering women friendly marketing networks and value chains for economic empowerment. In 2023, Bangladesh initiated a “Joyeeta Tower Construction Project” to improve accessible marketing facilities for women entrepreneurs. This building has the physical infrastructure needed to train female entrepreneurs in business management, development strategies, and knowledge and skill acquisition. The Joyeeta Iconic Tower features a multipurpose hall, seminar hall, bank, food court, cafe, beauty salon, childcare facility, women's gymnasium, and a swimming pool for both women and children. The newly built 12-story Joyeeta Tower in Dhanmondi, Dhaka, was officially opened on October 17, 2023. The internet marketplace E-Joyeeta has gone live.

**Women’s Financial Inclusion Data Dashboard:** Bangladesh Bank has launched the Women’s Financial Inclusion Data (WFID) Dashboard - a dedicated dashboard for women-centric financial inclusion data that provides valuable insights into various programs and initiatives aimed at empowering women economically.<sup>105</sup> Bangladesh Bank and Consumer Centric, with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, have collaborated since 2021 to develop the dashboard, which was launched on 6 March 2024.<sup>106</sup> The WFID Dashboard aims to illuminate the landscape of women's financial inclusion in Bangladesh through comprehensive data representation. By aggregating information from financial service providers, it presents a nuanced, gender-disaggregated analysis. The WFID Dashboard serves as a strategic tool, providing insights to empower stakeholders in identifying opportunities to expand women's financial inclusion. Through intuitive graphical presentations, the dashboard will help drive positive change by facilitating a deeper understanding of the financial landscape and fostering informed decision-making.

**Women Financial Inclusion Advocacy Forum (WFIAF):** Bangladesh Bank, together with aspire to innovate (a2i) (a multinational transformational catalyst, institutionalized in 2023 as a National Innovation Agency) jointly convened a policy advocacy forum to promote sustainable Financial Inclusion for women called Women’s Financial Inclusion Advocacy Forum (WFIAF).<sup>107</sup> The collaborative platform comprised regulators, academics, researchers, practitioners, and financial service providers. The main objective of the forum was to accelerate women’s economic empowerment through financial inclusion by catalysing knowledge generation, fostering best practices and sector collaboration. The Bangladesh Bank has been encouraging banks and Finance Companies (FCs) to increase the rate of female labour force participation, establish daycare centres, and initiate transportation facilities for female employees in order to establish gender equality and empower all women and girls in line with the SDG goals.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Information obtained from Bangladesh Bank in July 2024.

<sup>106</sup> M. N. Islam, Bangladesh Bank launches Women’s Financial Inclusion Data Dashboard, *Alliance for Financial Inclusion*, 14 March 2024, <https://www.afi-global.org/newsroom/blogs/bangladesh-bank-launches-womens-financial-inclusion-data-dashboard/#:~:text=Bangladesh%20Bank%20launches%20Women's%20Financial%20Inclusion%20Data%20Dashboard,-By%20Md%20Nazrul&text=Bangladesh%20Bank%20has%20launched%20a,identify%20opportunities%20to%20accelerate%20progress>. (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>107</sup> Information obtained from Bangladesh Bank in July 2024.

<sup>108</sup> Information obtained from Bangladesh Bank in July 2024.

### 3.1.2 Actions to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work

Care is a universal right and responsibility and essential for families, societies, and economies to function and thrive. In 2021, BBS conducted its first-ever TUS, with technical and financial support from the UN Women's "Women Count" programme. The survey report found that women spent 7.3 times as much time on unpaid care and domestic work as men, which includes cooking, cleaning, washing, taking care of children and the elderly, and so on.<sup>109</sup> have enabled Bangladesh to set a baseline to monitor progress on SDG Indicator 5.4.1.<sup>110</sup>

Bangladesh has acknowledged the importance of unpaid care and domestic work in its Eighth Five Year Plan (2020-2025). Unpaid care and domestic work contribute significantly to the economy by supporting households and enabling other economic activities. In 2022, the Parliamentary Standing Committee for the Ministry of Planning requested the creation of a National Household Production Satellite Account to measure the contribution of women's unpaid work to the economy, building on the data from the TUS. The Executive Committee meeting of the National Economic Council in 2023 called for women's unpaid household work to be brought into the calculation of the country's GDP.<sup>111</sup> This request has further escalated the creation of the Satellite Account as a national priority. BBS, ADB, UN Women and national experts are collaborating to create the Household Production Satellite Account expected to be completed by 2024. A National Satellite Account will enable the country to measure the economic value of unpaid work, bring to public and private attention the contribution of unpaid care and domestic work that underpins our societies and guide decision-makers in crafting overarching evidence-based and gender-responsive policies, programmes, and budgets.

The Child Day Care Centre Act 2021 was introduced in 2021 to provide standards and regulations for the operation of daycare centres so that children may be cared for and well-being is guaranteed in a comfortable atmosphere while their parents are at work. The impact of the introduction of the Child Day Care Centre Act 2021 on gender equality is manifold. It provides support for working parents, particularly mothers, by facilitating access to regulated childcare, which promotes greater female workforce participation and economic empowerment, while also formalizing the childcare sector to ensure high-quality, safe care for children. Currently, there are 64 government daycare centres which are providing Daycare facilities for the children of working women. Out of the total, 63 day care centres are run by MoWCA while and one is under MoSW.<sup>112</sup> According to the Bangladesh Bank, 37 banks and 5 FCs have individually or jointly established daycare centres. Guided by the National Action Plan for the National Women Development Policy 2011, MoLE has also prioritized the establishment of accommodation, rest rooms, toilets, and childcare/day

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<sup>109</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and UN Women, Time Use Survey 2021, 2023, [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-07-23-04-53-6417fa2e9d03538a1342942614845984.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-07-23-04-53-6417fa2e9d03538a1342942614845984.pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>110</sup> The proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location.

<sup>111</sup> Star Business Report, 'Include Women's Unpaid Work in GDP Calculation: PM', *The Daily Star*, 4 April 2023, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/include-womens-unpaid-work-gdp-calculation-pm-3288691>, (Accessed 11 July 2024).

<sup>112</sup> Information obtained from the Ministry of Social Welfare and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in July 2024.

care centres in workplaces with a high proportion of women employees. During the FY 2023-2024, 254 factories/institutions have set up day care centres and 364 motivational meetings have been held in this regard.<sup>113</sup> Between 2014 and 2024, 6,726 day care centres have been established and a total number of 6,057 motivational meetings have been held.<sup>114</sup> The impact of the introduction of the Child Day Care Centre Act 2021 on gender equality is manifold. It provides support for working parents, particularly mothers, by facilitating access to regulated childcare, which promotes greater female workforce participation and economic empowerment, while also formalizing the childcare sector to ensure high-quality, safe care for children.

### 3.1.3 Reducing gender digital divide

With the advent of growing technology, the digital divide is increasing. This is also experienced in Bangladesh. The proportion of women, aged 15 years and older, who own a mobile phone has seen a slight decline, from 63.3 per cent in 2020 to 62.8 per cent in 2024.<sup>115</sup> However, gains have been witnessed in other areas. For example, the proportion of women, aged 15 years and older, who use the internet has seen a steady rise, from 34.3 per cent in 2020 to 42.6 per cent in 2023. The employment of information technology in all spheres business, education, agriculture, social and political activities across Bangladesh, and the empowerment of women has received particular attention from the government over the past five years. The departments and organizations involved, particularly the Information and Communication Technology Division (ICTD), are working relentlessly for technological advancement. The Government of Bangladesh is striving to establish "Smart Bangladesh" by 2041, implement the 8th Five Year Plan, and achieve sustainable development by 2030 through the application of enhanced and sophisticated technology. Bangladesh is spearheading the 'Zero Digital Divide' campaign with the aim to create a society where everyone has equal access to digital opportunities. This also includes championing the cause of 'e-Quality' (digital equity) for adaptive, national system to catalyse transformations in public service delivery. Over the past five years, several flagship initiatives have been implemented to address the digital divide to realize the vision of a "Smart Bangladesh" by 2041.

To increase the scope of information technology's commercial usage, Bangladesh has invested in developing and improving digital infrastructure over the past five years. Facilities like Hi-Tech Park, IT Village, Software Technology Park, etc. have been established. Infrastructural development activities are creating direct employment opportunities and fostering entrepreneurship for women. Over 10,000 women entrepreneurs are now engaging in business activities through the Ekshop platform, which has enabled them to access new markets and resources.<sup>116</sup> There are 8,280 digital centres nationwide where female entrepreneurs are being

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<sup>113</sup> Information obtained from Ministry of Labour and Employment in July 2024.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023: Key Findings, 2024, [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-03-24-05-41-69f984d80716a740d40f7044bea63285.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-03-24-05-41-69f984d80716a740d40f7044bea63285.pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>116</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024*, 2023, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

employed. In 2022, around 1,000 women entrepreneurs have received a BDT 50,000 (USD 427.35) grant from the government under the “Innovation Design and Entrepreneurship Academy” (iDEA) project of the Bangladesh Computer Council under the ICT Division.<sup>117</sup> About 250,000 women including ethnic minorities have got IT training.<sup>118</sup> In addition to investing in digital infrastructure, the Government of Bangladesh has implemented several flagship projects and programmes to address the gender digital divide.

**Tottho Apa (Info Lady): Empowerment of Women through ICT Project:** The flagship project “InfoApa: Empowerment of Women through ICT Project (Phase 2) to build Digital Bangladesh”, known as “Tottho Apa” under MoWCA concluded in June 2023. Implemented since 2017, the BDT 58.58 billion project covered 492 upazilas, across 64 districts, with the objective on empowering rural women through access to information technology and provision of information technology-based services. Information centres have been established in each upazila, operated by female information services officers and assistants, providing round-the-clock internet connectivity, as well as primary health care services (blood pressure tests, diabetes tests, etc.). The e-commerce marketplace named Laalsobuj.com (www.laalsobuj.com), launched in 2021, has improved grassroots women entrepreneurs' access to nationwide e-commerce opportunities.

**Aspire to Innovate (a2i) Programme:** a2i, an ICT Division whole-of-government program supported by the Cabinet Division and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), is simplifying public service delivery through digital transformation and innovation. Since its launch in 2007, a2i has spearheaded innovative solutions across sectors, and in 2023, was institutionalized as a National Innovation Agency with an international wing to support LDCs in achieving the SDGs. Initiatives, such as Ma-Telehealth Centre by a2i is helping women in need through the use of digital services. Launched in June 2020, a-Telehealth Centre enables expecting mothers and lactating women with newborns receive consultations from certified doctors, counselling services, e-prescriptions, and follow-up health services. Since its launch, a-Telehealth Centre has received 438,00 calls and served 100,000 patients.<sup>119</sup> In 2022, a2i formulated the Sathi Network, a women-led agent network that aims to accelerate the financial inclusion of rural and marginalised women by promoting women’s entrepreneurship, enhancing women’s financial literacy and most importantly, providing access to financial services. Since its launch, over 160,000 marginalised women have opened bank accounts with support women agents of the Sathi Network.<sup>120</sup> Having accounts on these financial service platforms allows women to have day-to-day control over their finances and assets from any location. Another initiative under a2i is the ekShop, launched in 2019, the world’s first integrated, government-assisted e-commerce architecture model. The mission of ekShop was to create digital avenues for market access, service access, payment access, and delivery access, reducing the digital divide. The ekShop platform empowers CMSMEs led mainly by women entrepreneurs with open commerce platforms such as Anandamela, Joyeeta, WE,

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<sup>117</sup> TBS Report, 1,000 women entrepreneurs receive Tk5 crore grant from iDEA project, *The Business Standard*, 29 September 2022, <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/corporates/1000-women-entrepreneurs-receive-tk5-crore-grant-idea-project-505782>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>118</sup> Data driven from ICT Division, 2023.

<sup>119</sup> a2i, *Digital Equity: Digital Transformation of Public Services*, n.d. <https://a2i.gov.bd/a2i-missions/digital-equity/>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>120</sup> N. Sharmin, R. Sharmin, and I. H. Sohel, Sathi Network: A pathway to women’s economic empowerment, *The Business Standard*, 7 July 2023, <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/sathi-network-pathway-womens-economic-empowerment-661518>, (accessed 16 September 2024) .



Digital Haat, and e-market of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation and SME Foundation.<sup>121</sup> Since its inception, ekShop has served around 4 million consumers,<sup>122</sup> Over 10,000 female entrepreneurs are using the ekShop platform to do business.<sup>123</sup>

With an upward trend in digital engagement and dependence, the risk of online harassment and cybercrime rises, especially for women, girls, and other marginalized groups. The Government of Bangladesh, along with civil society organizations, are taking action to address cybercrime and online violence. The PCSW, an all-women cyber support service, was introduced in 2020. PCSW provides necessary legal and technological support to female victims of cyber-crime while ensuring confidentiality of victim's information. The PCSW also promotes and disseminates cyber security related awareness. From FY 2016–2017 to FY 2021–2022, 1,325 educational institutions also provided training to 89,085 female students on "Girls Awareness in Digital Security" in an effort to raise girls' awareness of cybercrime. Organizations, such as 'Women in Digital',<sup>124</sup> also implement projects and initiatives to promote women and girls' education and awareness of technology, including cybercrime. Since their establishment in 2013, 'Women in Digital' has arranged annual nationwide cyber awareness programs.

### 3.1.4 Impacts of macroeconomic and fiscal policy on the implementation of the BPfA

Bangladesh's macroeconomic and fiscal policies over the past five years have made substantial contributions to the implementation of the BPfA. By focusing on GRB, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship development these policies have empowered women and paved the way for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable economic growth.

The gradual increase and systematic allocation of gender budgets over the years has been a key driver impacting women's empowerment and welfare. These investments have supported initiatives such as the expansion of social safety nets, increased funding for women-led businesses, and improved access to education and healthcare for women and girls. In the current fiscal year (2024-2025), MoWCA has the highest allocation of the gender budget of BDT 469.76 billion (USD 4.02 billion), which amounts to 90 per cent of the ministry's total budget. MoPME has received the second highest gender budget allocation of BDT 2490.1 billion (USD 21.28 billion), amounting to 64.2 per cent of their total budget, followed by the MoSW, which has a gender budget allocation of BDT 675.2 billion (USD 5.77 billion), which is 52.5 per cent of the total ministry's budget.

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<sup>121</sup> Z. B. Liaquat, ekShop: Taking Bangladeshi e-commerce to the world, *Dhaka Tribune*, 1 March 2022, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/264739/ekshop-taking-bangladeshi-e-commerce-to-the-world>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>122</sup> S. Ahmed, Empowering e-commerce, reducing rural-urban gaps, *The Business Post*, 4 September 2022, <https://businesspostbd.com/business-connect/2022-09-04/empowering-e-commerce-reducing-rural-urban-gaps-2022-09-04>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>123</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024*, 2023, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>124</sup> Home Page, *Women in Digital*, 2024, <https://www.womenindigital.net/>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

Table 4 Top 5 ministries/divisions receiving a significant share of the gender budget in FY 2024-2025

Ministry/Division	Total Budget (in crore* BDT)	Gender Budget (in crore* BDT)	Gender-relevant allocation as per cent of total
Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs	5222.2	4697.6	89.9
Ministry of Primary and Mass Education	38819.3	24901	64.2
Ministry of Social Welfare	12869.4	6751.6	52.5
Secondary and Higher Education Division	44108.3	21484.8	48.7
Medical Education and Family Welfare Division	11282.4	5478.6	48.6

\* 1 Crore = 1,00,00,000  
Source: Gender Budget Report 2024-25

Fiscal policy, including progressive taxation, has also contributed to advancing gender equality in Bangladesh. Under the current tax structure, the tax-free income threshold for women (including the elderly, persons with disabilities, members from the “third gender”, and freedom fighters) is higher by BDT 50,000 (USD 427.35) than for men (capped at an income level up to BDT 350,000, equivalent to USD 2,991.45).<sup>125</sup>

The Bangladesh Bank, the country's central bank, has played a pivotal role by actively supporting women entrepreneurs through a range of targeted financial initiatives. For example, the Bangladesh Bank issued a circular on 22 October 2023 to include agender aspects in their Sustainable Finance Policy.<sup>126</sup> By integrating gender aspects into sustainable finance initiatives and policies, Banks and FCs can contribute to a more holistic and inclusive approach to sustainability, recognizing that gender equality is a fundamental component of social and environmental balance and governance. The bank has also issued Lead Banks Guidelines (15 January 2020) and has developed a Lead Bank Calendar to disseminate CMSME-related information at the grassroots level through different programmes to facilitate women entrepreneurs' development activities.<sup>127</sup>

Bangladesh Bank is actively providing diverse forms of policy support to women entrepreneurs considering the significance of the cottage, micro, small, and medium enterprise (CMSME) sector in promoting sustainable economic development in the country. Bangladesh Bank has set a target for all banks and FCs to increase small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) loan disbursement to 25 per cent of the total loan portfolio and provide loan facilities to women entrepreneurs, amounting to 15 per cent of the total SME portfolio by 2024.<sup>128</sup> The “Small Enterprise Refinance Scheme” run by Bangladesh Bank provides 100 per cent refinancing of loans to SME women

<sup>125</sup> Information obtained from National Board of Revenue, in 2022.

<sup>126</sup> Information obtained from Bangladesh Bank in July 2024.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.



entrepreneurs with a maximum interest rate of 5 per cent at customer level and 0.5 per cent at bank and FC level. Fund size of “Small Enterprise Refinance Scheme” has been increased from BDT 1,50 billion to BDT 3,00 billion which is playing a crucial role in providing credit to SME women entrepreneurs. Under the said refinancing scheme, a total of BDT 8,49.56 billion has been refinanced against loans provided to 61,924 women entrepreneurs from 2004 to June 2024.

The Bangladesh Bank has been continuously encouraging banks and FCs to facilitate refinancing facilities for women entrepreneurs against collateral-free loans up to a maximum of BDT 2.5 million against third-party personal guarantees.<sup>129</sup> Apart from the “Small Enterprise Refinance Scheme”, women entrepreneurs can also avail of refinances from different refinancing schemes to a maximum interest rate at 7 per cent from banks and finance companies in CMSME sector. To encourage timely adjustment/recovery/repayment of loans/investment for women entrepreneurs by Banks and FCs, a 2 per cent incentive (1% for the concerned Bank/FC and 1% for the customer) was announced by the Bangladesh Bank for loans/investments disbursed from July 01, 2021 to December 31, 2024.<sup>130</sup> The Credit Guarantee Scheme has been introduced against unsecured loans/investments in the CMS sector in order to increase the flow of credit/investment. Banks and FCs have also been instructed to reserve a minimum of 10 per cent of the Portfolio Guarantee Limit for women entrepreneurs. Moreover, Bangladesh Bank has instructed banks and finance companies to seek the help of women entrepreneurs' chambers/associations in the selection of women entrepreneurs, prioritize loan applications of women entrepreneurs, and develop and implement special banking strategies to finance women entrepreneurs.<sup>131</sup>

The "Women Entrepreneurship Development Unit", established in 2014, continues to operate to enhance monitoring efforts for the growth of women entrepreneurs in the head and branch offices of Bangladesh Bank and the regional offices, including the head offices of all banks and financial institutions. Apart from these services, women entrepreneurs can directly contact the problem solution centre of the SME & Special Programs Department in case of any kind of harassment in accessing credit facilities or to get information and advice regarding financial services. Moreover, a hotline (16236) is in place to directly talk to the concerned Bangladesh Bank official for help in filing complaints. Furthermore, to offer financial support services to women entrepreneurs and to receive and resolve their concerns, a dedicated Women Entrepreneurs' Desk/Help Desk has been established in every branch of all banks and financial institutions. Throughout the FY 2022–2023 financial services were provided to a total of 14,66,814 people—8,81,563 women and 5,85,251 men.<sup>132</sup>

### **3.2 Poverty eradication, social protection, and social services**

**Critical areas of concern:** Women and poverty, education and training of women, women and health, human rights of women, and the girl child.

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<sup>129</sup> Information obtained from Bangladesh Bank in July 2024.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024, 2023*,

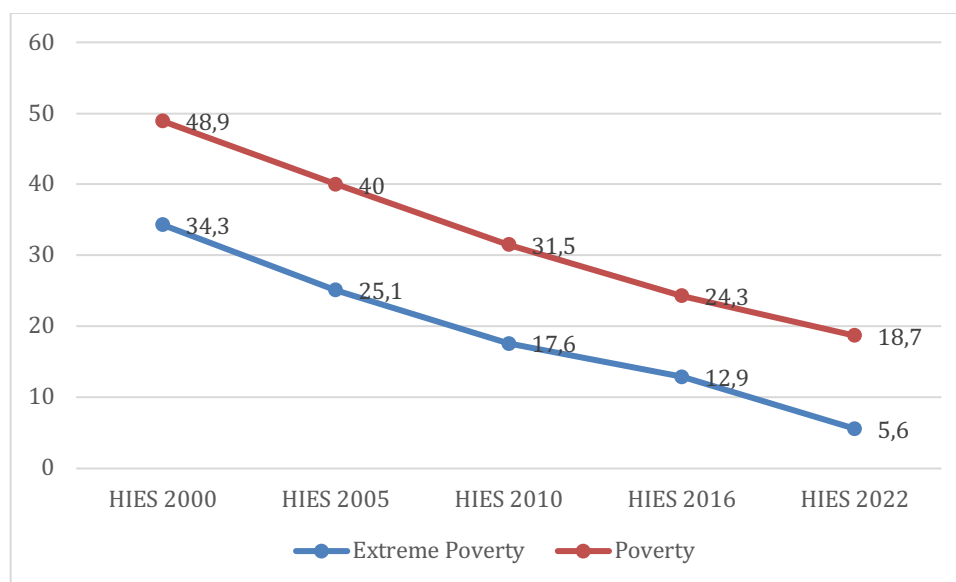
[https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

### 3.2.1 Actions relating to reducing/eradicating poverty among women and girls

The Bangladesh government remains committed to lowering inequality, promoting human development, and eradicating poverty. This commitment has been represented in the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan 2020-2025, and the PP2041 of the government. The projections for poverty indicate that by 2041, the percentages of people living in extreme poverty and overall poverty will drop to 2.59 per cent and 0.68 per cent, respectively.<sup>133</sup> Along with the adoption of the "leaving no one behind" principles, a whole-of-society approach has been taken to address SDG 1 on poverty eradication. The government is trying to enhance beneficiary targeting and selection in order to guarantee that the "farthest behind are reached first." It is also gradually transitioning from the humanitarian approach of safety nets to the rights-based strategy of social protection.

With the combined efforts of numerous social enterprises, private investment, and government development initiatives, Bangladesh has made significant strides towards reducing poverty. The poverty rate decreased from 40.0 per cent in 2005 to 18.7 per cent in 2022, as reported by the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), with 5.6 per cent of people living in extreme poverty (2022). In order to maintain the current rate of poverty reduction, the 8th Five Year Plan 2020–2025 has set a goal of bringing the rate down to 15.6 per cent by 2025.<sup>134</sup>

Figure 1 Official Poverty Estimates 2000-2022



Source: Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2022

<sup>133</sup> Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 'Accelerated Action and Transformative Pathways: Realizing the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development: Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) 2020', June 2020, <https://file-rajshahi.portal.gov.bd/uploads/47d5d143-f8e7-4fb3-864b-45d66aad6c3f/636/c87/188/636c871882b91681133196.pdf>, (accessed August 2024).

<sup>134</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, *Bangladesh Economic Review 2023: Chapter 13 Poverty Alleviation*, 2023, <https://mof.gov.bd/site/page/44e399b3-d378-41aa-86ff-8c4277eb0990/Bangladesh-Economic-Review>, (accessed 12 September 2024)

Bangladesh's position in the global SDG rankings has improved dramatically, going from 116<sup>th</sup> out of 162 in 2019<sup>135</sup> to 107<sup>th</sup> out of 166 in 2023.<sup>136</sup> Over the previous fifteen years, the nation has grown its GDP at an outstanding 6.7 per cent annual rate while maintaining a pro-poor agenda. Extreme poverty has dropped from 25.1 per cent in 2005 to 5.6 per cent in 2022, while moderate poverty has decreased from 40 per cent to 18.7 per cent in the same period, according to the HIES. The compound rate of poverty reduction during 2016-2022 averaged 4.27 per cent. However, poverty has decreased at a lower rate in urban areas than in rural areas (rural areas 5.9 per centage point, urban areas 4.2 per centage point).<sup>137</sup> The government intends to further up its efforts on poverty eradication as stipulated in the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan to guarantee inclusive growth, which aims to reduce the rate of poverty to 15.6 per cent and extreme poverty to 7.4 per cent by 2025.<sup>138</sup>

The Ashrayan Project, initiated by the Government of Bangladesh in 1997, aims to making landless-homeless people self-reliant by providing accommodation, training, and financing under social security programmes. 'Ashrayan' is a Bengali word that stands for 'shelter' in English. The project maintains a particular focus on women's empowerment by providing women shared ownership of land and houses, providing trainings and microcredit for livelihoods support, providing free electricity connection, providing clean water by installing one shallow tube well for every 10 families, and providing food assistance under three months of the vulnerable group feeding (VGF) scheme to the resettled families initially, among other.<sup>139</sup> Priority is also given to the ultra-poor, widows, elderly, women abandoned by their husbands, insolvent freedom fighters, climate victims, third gender, Dalit, persons with disabilities, and persons from ethnic minorities. The Government of Bangladesh continues to implement the Ashrayan project since its inception in 1997 as a pivotal initiative for poverty eradication. From 1997 to 2022, 538,139 families have been supported through the Ashrayan project.<sup>140</sup> As a result, a considerable number of districts and sub-districts have been proclaimed free of landlessness and homelessness.<sup>141</sup> It is the largest government rehabilitation program in the world in terms of number of beneficiaries and rehabilitation methods. The Ashrayan project specifically contributes to SDG targets 10.2, 2.3,

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<sup>135</sup> J. Sachs, G. Schmidt-Traub, C. Kroll, G. Lafortune, and G. Fuller, *Sustainable Development Report 2019: Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, New York: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2019, <https://sdgtransformationcenter.org/reports/sustainable-development-report-2019>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>136</sup> J.D. Sachs, G. Lafortune, G. Fuller, *Sustainable Development Report 2024: The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future*, Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press, 2024, <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/chapters>, (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>137</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Bangladesh Economic Review 2023: Chapter 13 Poverty Alleviation*, 2023, <https://mof.gov.bd/site/page/44e399b3-d378-41aa-86ff-8c4277eb0990/Bangladesh-Economic-Review> (accessed 12 September 2024)

<sup>138</sup> General Economics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Sustainable Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report 2022, 2022*, [https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b\\_4dc1\\_4744\\_be4a\\_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book\\_compressed.pdf](https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b_4dc1_4744_be4a_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book_compressed.pdf), (accessed August 2024)

<sup>139</sup> UNB, Dhaka, 'Ashrayan Project: It's helping Bangladesh eradicate poverty', *The Daily Star*, 19 April 2023, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/ashrayan-project-its-helping-bangladesh-eradicate-poverty-3300281>, (Accessed in August 2024).

<sup>140</sup> Prime Minister's Office, 'Ashrayan: Home for Landless-Homeless – A Bangladesh Initiative', Published in September 2022, <https://service.ashrayanpmo.gov.bd/storage/publications/2023/May/11/Kbby5C4iOwYgUQJmCVT5JXMh7RTaB8os2qNd9YV9.pdf>, (Accessed in August 2024).

<sup>141</sup> Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *SDG Summit 2023: Bangladesh Country Commitments*, 2023, <https://sdgs.un.org/national-commitments-sdg-transformation/22071>, (accessed 15 September 2024).

1.4, and 5 (a).<sup>142</sup> In total, 3,700,160 persons have benefited from various initiatives by the Government of Bangladesh to eradicate homelessness and poverty, including the Ashrayan project.<sup>143</sup>

Figure 2 Homeless families rehabilitated through various ministries from 1997 to 2022, including through the Ashrayan project.



Source: Ashrayan: Homes for Landless-Homeless, Prime Minister's Office, 2022

### 3.2.2 Measures for improving access to social protection for women and girls

The social security budget has steadily increase over the past five years, underscoring the government's strong commitment to poverty eradication and social security. The social protection budget has risen from BDT 95,68.3 billion in the Revised Budget (RB) for FY2021 to BDT 136,02.6 billion in the Budget for FY2024-2025, an increase of 42.16 per cent. In the budget for FY2024-25, the proposed allocation for the total social safety net budget represents a 12 per cent increase compared to RBFY 2024.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024*, 2023, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>143</sup> Prime Minister's Office, 'Ashrayan: Home for Landless-Homeless – A Bangladesh Initiative', Published in September 2022, <https://service.ashrayanpmo.gov.bd/storage/publications/2023/May/11/Kbby5C4iOwYgUQJmCVT5JXMh7RTaB8os2qNd9YV9.pdf>, (Accessed in August 2024).

<sup>144</sup> Finance Division, 'Promoting Inclusive Growth and Social Inclusion: Social Security Budget Report 2024-25', Published in June 2024, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/03420639\\_b754\\_4e26\\_83bb\\_85cf7d6c7a5a/Social%20Security%20Budget%20Report%20%282024-25%29\\_compressed%20%281%29.pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/03420639_b754_4e26_83bb_85cf7d6c7a5a/Social%20Security%20Budget%20Report%20%282024-25%29_compressed%20%281%29.pdf), (Accessed in August 2024).

In 2023, Bangladesh enacted the Universal Pension Management Act. The main objective of the Act is to provide a sustainable and well-structured social security net to all sections of the people of the country, especially the aged population due to the increase in average life expectancy. The Act expands pension coverage to a broader segment of the population, including informal sector workers who historically lacked access to formal pension schemes. This includes a significant number of women working in informal and part-time jobs. Bangladesh has also formulated the Universal Pension Management Rule, 2023 for effective implementation of the Act.

The National Social Security Strategy Action Plan, Phase-II 2021-2026 of the government outlines the adoption of a life-cycle-based social security approach by the MoSW. Bangladesh signed a loan agreement of USD 250 million with ADB to support the second phase of the National Social Security Strategy Action Plan in 2024.<sup>145</sup> The second phase of the action plan has targeted the underprivileged and climate vulnerable women and children. The newly passed Universal Pension Scheme paved the way for the inclusion informal sector workers, constituting a large number of women. A special scheme named “Suraksha” for the informal workers has been introduced to avail the universal pension scheme.

MoSW has taken steps to create an efficient social safety net by giving **old age benefits** to 5.701 million people, widow and abandoned woman benefits to 2.475 million people, and disability benefits to 2.365 million disabled people.<sup>146</sup> It is now required that women receive 100 per cent of the widow payment and at least 50 per cent of the old age and disability allowances. In addition, Upazila Cooperative Department Offices operate a number of training facilities that offer vocational instruction in a variety of trades to support women's socioeconomic growth. Eighty-one skilled development training centres under this ministry provided training to 17,118 trainees in FY 2021-2022, of whom 7,648 are women (44.68%). Well-trained women provide financial support to the nation and their families.<sup>147</sup> Stipends for students with disabilities and cash payment programs for the improvement of quality of life of Hijra, Bede and other vulnerable communities have also continued.

In May 2024 Bangladesh joined the ILO Initiative on Global Coalition on Social Justice. The government, through DoL, has been implementing the “Social Protection Program for Unemployed and Distressed Workers of Export oriented sectors”, such as garment industry, tannery, leather goods, jute goods, small cottage industry, ship building, frozen foods, pet flex industry.<sup>148</sup> Unemployed and distressed workers get BDT 3,000 per month as cash incentives under the scope of this program.<sup>149</sup> A total of BDT 92.49 million has been paid to a total of 10,277 beneficiaries from December 2020 to June 2024.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Star Business Report, ‘ADB extends \$250 million loan to strengthen social protection’, *The Daily Star*, 10 June 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/adb-extends-250-million-loan-strengthen-social-protection-3631601>, (Accessed in August 2024).

<sup>146</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024, 2023*, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>147</sup> Ibid

<sup>148</sup> Information obtained from Ministry of Labour and Employment in July 2024.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid

<sup>150</sup> Ibid

The Piloting of Employment Injury Scheme (EIS) in the RMG sector was launched on 21 June 2022 with support from the ILO.<sup>151</sup> Since June 2023, the workers have started receiving long term top up compensation benefits under the pilot EIS scheme.

During the FY 2023-2024, under the supervision of the Central Fund (CF), 12,662 workers and their children received an amount of 567.41 million taka as financial benefits.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, a total of BDT 315.51 has been paid to a total of 6,869 beneficiaries under Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation in FY 2023-2024.<sup>153</sup>

### **3.2.3 Advancing health outcomes for women and girls**

Over the past five years, there has been a significant advancement in women's healthcare. Women's access to healthcare has risen due to advancements in mother and childcare, women's reproductive health, a decline in the rate of maternal and infant mortality, and the establishment of the local healthcare system. Vaccinating children from birth to age eighteen and women with reproductive potential from age fifteen to age forty-five has greatly reduced the rates of connected diseases, disability, and infant and maternal death.

The Health Services Division (HSD) of the MoHFP making sure that all men and women have access to high-quality healthcare by developing the population, nutrition, and health sectors in an effort to build a robust, healthy, and effective workforce. The HSD has placed great emphasis on the involvement of women in the medical field as doctors, nurses, and even in surgical roles, in addition to guaranteeing equal services for men and women. More opportunities to assist the nation's female population arise as the number of female service providers rises.

Achieving sustainable development in the areas of health, nutrition, and reproductive health has been prioritized in the Perspective Plan 2041, particularly towards the development of healthcare services for women, children, and the elderly.

In order to provide the rural people with free primary healthcare as well as free critical medications, such as insulin, community clinics have been built at the ward level of the local government. The initiative started from 2017 and is being run by the Directorate General of Health Services. According to the Finance Minister's budget speech in June 2023, there are a total of 14,384 community clinics (CCs) as of FY 2022-2023, in current estimates of population. This amounts to one CC for each 12,000 people. The government plans to establish one community clinic for every 6,000 residents. Currently, 14,878 CCs have been established, with women and children making up 80 per cent of the clinic's clientele. The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution in 2023 designating the "Community Based Healthcare Centre" flagship program as a remarkable initiative of Bangladesh. The UN has unanimously adopted the first-ever resolution on community-based health care. The resolution, titled "Community-based primary health care: a participatory and inclusive approach to universal health coverage," acknowledged the important role CCs play in promoting primary health care, women's empowerment, community engagement and

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid

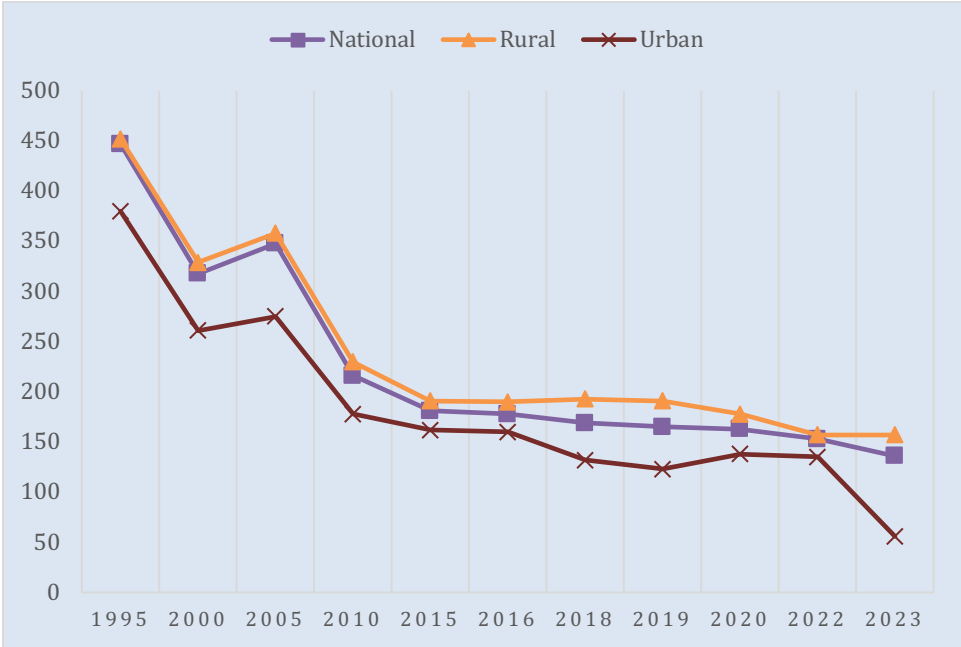
<sup>152</sup> Ibid

<sup>153</sup> Ibid

mobilization towards achieving universal access to health. By introducing the “Community Clinic Model of Bangladesh”, the resolution asks member states to explore measures to scale up and reference best practices to benefit from successful national experience.

According to the Bangladesh Vital Statistics Report 2023, the rate of maternal death has decreased to 136 per 100,000 live births in 2023 from 216 in 2010 and 178 in 2016. All around the nation, CCs have played a critical role in providing women and children with access to essential services.

Figure 3 Maternal Mortality Ratio (1995–2023)



Source: Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, BBS

Bangladesh has adopted the "National Mental Health Policy 2022" and passed the Mental Health Act 2018, which replaces the antiquated "Indian Lunacy Act 1912." Eight hospitals at the divisional level are being modernized with specialized mental health departments, while the Pabna mental health facility is being brought up to international standards. Children with specific needs receive mental health support from Shishu Bikash Kendra. The goal of these initiatives is to offer accessible, inclusive, and all-encompassing mental health services. The aim of the new policy is to address the special circumstances and needs of those experiencing mental health issues. The elderly, people with disabilities, people with chronic physical illnesses (such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), people with communicable diseases (like Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, or leprosy), pregnant women with any mental health conditions (such as pre- and postpartum depression, postpartum psychosis), and survivors of disasters, violence, and humanitarian crisis events are among the vulnerable populations.



In an effort to raise the standard of care for expectant mothers and newborns, Bangladesh has adopted the National Strategy for Maternal Health 2019–2035.<sup>154</sup> According to the National Strategy for Maternal Health 2019–2030, the government intends to increase the per centage of births assisted by skilled health personnel to 60 per cent in 2020, 80 per cent in 2025, and 90 per cent in 2030 and reduce the MMR for the same years to 145 per 100 000 live births, 100 per 100 000 live births, and 70 per 100 000 live births, respectively.

According to BBS, Bangladesh's infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) was 26.9 in 2023 as opposed to 21 in 2020. Comparing the neonatal mortality (per 1000 live births) to the 19.5 recorded in 2023, the number was 15. Maternal mortality (per 100,000 live births) decreased to 136 in 2023 from 163. The per centage of births attended by trained medical professionals climbed from 53 per cent in 2017–18 to 89.75 per cent in 2023<sup>155</sup>. The primary causes of the drop in infant and maternal mortality are immunization campaigns, the prevention of diarrhoea, vitamin A supplements, better access to healthcare, improvements in female education, and more income.

In 2010, Bangladesh started putting the Maternal and Perinatal Death Review (MPDR) system into practice. The program was later revised and renamed as the Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response (MPDSR) system in 2016 based on lessons learned from implementation and worldwide norms. It was incorporated into government programs on a regular basis and progressively covered more ground, eventually covering all 64 districts by 2022. The national MPDSR guidelines and tools, which included a stillbirth review component in line with the worldwide MPDSR implementation guideline, were finalized by the government of Bangladesh in 2022. Healthcare providers and district managers attended training courses on MPDSR performance reviews, cause analysis, and reaction plan formulation, while a technical working group was established to create a video toolkit.<sup>156</sup> According to Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2022, the country's MMR has decreased by 38 per cent between 2000 and 2022, going from 441 deaths to 156 deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>157</sup>

Expansion of family planning services at the doorstep by family planning field workers, reproductive health services are playing a vital role for mother and childcare services. Special reproductive health care services are playing a vital role for reducing women and adolescent mother motility rate. Services and awareness building programs continue to educate women, especially the poor women about maternity and children rearing.

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<sup>154</sup> Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, *4<sup>th</sup> Cycle Universal Periodic Review, 'National Report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and 16/21, Bangladesh'*, General Assembly, Forty-fourth session, UN Doc A/HRC/WG.6/44/BGD/1, (1 September 2023),

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/178/07/pdf/g2317807.pdf>, (accessed August 2024)

<sup>155</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 'Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023 Key Findings', Published in March 2024, [http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/SVRS/SVRS%202023%20Final%20Report\\_web.pdf](http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/SVRS/SVRS%202023%20Final%20Report_web.pdf), (Accessed in July 2024).

<sup>156</sup> Maternal Health Program, Directorate General of Health Services, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, '*Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response (MPDSR) in Bangladesh: Progress and Highlights in 2022*', Published in January 2023, [https://bangladesh.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/mpdsr\\_report\\_2022\\_final\\_version\\_dghs.pdf](https://bangladesh.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/mpdsr_report_2022_final_version_dghs.pdf), (Accessed in August 2024).

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

In 2023, the High Court Division (HCD) issued a historic ruling,<sup>158</sup> directing the relevant government departments to establish breastfeeding corners in public areas such as bus stops, train stations, airports, and workplaces.

18,131 caesarean sections and 5,26,106 spontaneous births were handled by institutional delivery services.<sup>159</sup> At the national level, more than two out of five births (50.79%) were given through C-section in 2023<sup>160</sup>. The number of government medical colleges has expanded from 17 in 2009 to 37 currently. From 40 in 2009 to 72 till date, there are now more private medical colleges. Twelve private dental colleges and one government dental institution are present. The number of government medical assistant training schools has increased from 5 to 16, while the number of government institutes of health technology has climbed by 7 to 23.<sup>161</sup> Women make up 55 per cent of the students enrolled in these institutions and schools. More women now have the chance to take part in nursing programmes and services as a result of this.

### 3.2.4 Promoting education outcomes and skills for women and girls

The 8th FYP 2020–2025 addresses the unresolved problems and difficulties associated with primary education, including lowering absence and dropout rates, and guaranteeing higher-quality educational outcomes, producing better citizens, and building more advanced instruments for measuring learning outcomes. The 8th Five Year Plan has taken a number of steps to address the issues facing secondary education, including creating more accurate instruments for measuring learning outcomes, changing the way that students are examined and evaluated, boosting the number of science students enrolled, implementing a common curriculum up to class X, enhancing equity, emphasizing the importance of ICT-based learning, enhancing the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) stream, and fostering stronger industry-academia collaboration.<sup>162</sup>

The Bangladesh government has been expanding and improving primary education through a number of modern initiatives. There are currently 2,01,00,972 students enrolled in 1,18,891 primary educational institutions nationwide, including 65,566 government elementary schools.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Parban Chakma and Sadika Nousheen, 'Notable Decisions of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh', *The Daily Star*, 5 January 2024, <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/notable-decisions-the-supreme-court-bangladesh-3511391>, (Accessed in August 2024).

<sup>159</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024*, 2023, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>160</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 'Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023 Key Findings', Published in March 2024, [http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/SVRS/SVRS%202023%20Final%20Report\\_web.pdf](http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/SVRS/SVRS%202023%20Final%20Report_web.pdf), (Accessed in July 2024).

<sup>161</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, 'Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024', Published in June, 2023, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (Accessed in August 2024).

<sup>162</sup> General Economics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Sustainable Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report 2022*, 2022, [https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b\\_4dc1\\_4744\\_be4a\\_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book\\_compressed.pdf](https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b_4dc1_4744_be4a_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book_compressed.pdf), (accessed August 2024)

<sup>163</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024*, 2023, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

Table 5 Number of students enrolled in primary education–2022 (Pre–primary to 5th)

Institution	Total	Male	Female	Per centage of Female
Government Primary Schools	11,995,222	5,737,879	6,257,343	52.17
Private Primary Schools	833,476	418,860	414,616	49.75
Ebtedayee Madrasah School	663,670	341,031	322,639	48.61
Kindergarten Schools	4,608,679	2,369,976	2,238,703	48.58
N.G.O. Schools (Grade 1–5)	532,642	263,748	268,894	50.48
Primary Section Schools in Madrasas	486,274	244,830	241,444	49.65
Primary Section of High Schools	884,286	381,893	502,393	56.81
Child Welfare Primary School	35,574	17,440	18,134	50.98
Other NGOs Educational Centres	305,206	145,521	159,685	52.32
Others	201,062	103,773	97,289	48.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,546,091</b>	<b>10,024,951</b>	<b>10,521,140</b>	<b>51.21</b>

Source: Gender Budget Report 2024-2025, MoF

According to the TVET Development Plan 2018 developed by the Department of Technical and Madrasa Education, various activities are undertaken to increase the enrolment and skills of women in technical education. In 2023, the Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced the "ProGRESS - Promoting Gender Responsive Enterprise Development and TVET Systems," project with ILO. By focusing on policies, processes, and operational levels, this program aims to improve TVET and enterprise development systems and make them more inclusive and accessible for women.

These actions are taken in fulfilment of the state commitment to provide education services under Articles 15 and 17 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. The government is conducting various activities on expanding technical and vocational education through the implementation of the National Education Policy 2010 and the National Skill Development Policy 2022-2027.

Bangladesh formulated a National Action Plan for Skills Development 2022-2027 to ensure sustainable, inclusive, and widespread skills development of the Bangladesh labour force through enhancement of institutional efficiency, strengthening of transparency and accountability, consolidation of good governance and proper allocation of resources in the Ministries and Departments and their subordinate departments and agencies. The plan covers every sector of society by including the provision of training opportunities. This involves taking steps to detect barriers to access and putting corrective measures in place for those who belong to marginalized groups—such as women, residents of remote rural communities, underprivileged young people, and people with disabilities—often confronted. The plan identifies six categories for training: apprenticeship, entrepreneurship, reskilling, upskilling, and recognition of prior learning. The plan seeks to increase access to underserved areas and competency-based training for workers in the informal sector as well as for marginalized groups, such as women, individuals with disabilities, those living in less developed and accessible areas, those living in rural areas, and ethnic minorities.

The government's efforts have resulted in a significant increase in the enrolment of women in technical education. In 2010, the per centage of students enrolled in technical education was 1 per cent; by 2022, it had risen to 15.79 per cent, with 27.01 per cent of students being female.<sup>164</sup> There are well-defined goals and plans in place to advance and modernize madrasa education. In addition, the Technical and Madrasa Division (TMED) is working on research, training, project and policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, administrative policy formulation and reform, and practical ICT application in education management in order to enhance the quality of technical and madrasa education.

The Government of Bangladesh underlined the significance of the blended education to guarantee high-quality education for everyone during the UN Secretary General's Transforming Education Summit (TES), which took place on September 19, 2022. The government pledges to modernize the national curriculum in line with PP2041, with an overarching objective to become a developed and knowledge-based economy considering the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The goals of the government for the primary subsector are to create a more sustainable and well-managed education system, guarantee universal coverage and equitable access to high-quality primary education, and enhance school quality and system efficiency. The primary goal is to fulfil SDG 4 by guaranteeing that every child receives a high-quality education by 2030. The main goals of the government's education programmes and initiatives have been to improve the education sector's quality and governance, increase enrolment, and implement reforms.

Most of the nation's elementary education facilities are overseen by MoPME. These educational establishments educate over 70 per cent of all primary students and out of them 49.50 per cent of females receive opportunities to complete primary school.<sup>165</sup> In addition, the requirement of 60 per cent female instructors in primary school teaching has created more job prospects for educated women. As a result, women's empowerment is guaranteed, and their social position rises.

Aiming to promote information and communications technology (ICT) for education, the government has also taken initiative by equipping all classrooms with multimedia classrooms and digital smart boards. Teachers are receiving training to ensure interactive classes and on using e-books and e-learning materials. ICT for Pedagogy is an additional initiative to improve ICT, and the MoE is implementing ICT learning in every district of the nation under the “Secondary Education Sector Investment Programme” (SESIP). The National Strategy for the Development of Education Statistics and action plan for Bangladesh, as well as a National Indicator Framework, data mapping, and data quality assessment framework, have all been developed as part of this process by the statistical office for education, Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics. Thirty-one of the framework's 130 national-level indicators will directly contribute to SDG 4.

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<sup>164</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024, 2023*, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>165</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024, 2023*, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

The government, under the Ministry of Textiles & Jute, has taken initiative for the development of technical education, skill enhancement and productivity of entrepreneurs, workers and others through technical and vocational education and training.<sup>166</sup> Women entrepreneur shall be provided relevant training that will facilitate them to become economically empowered. The government has set targets of creating around five thousand skilled human resources in every year from 2022-2027<sup>167</sup>.

Data shows that, with an average of approximately 1.72 million training per annum, around 8.6 million trainings across 17+ sectors have been envisaged by ministries and external stakeholders over the five-year horizon from FY 2022-23 to FY 2026-27. Trainings have been identified across 6 categories- fresh skilling, up-skilling, re-skilling, entrepreneurship, apprenticeship, and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). One of the key activities of the action plan in to improve access to underserved areas as well as access to competency-based training to marginalized groups (including women, persons with disabilities and people in less developed and inaccessible areas, people in rural areas & Ethnic minorities) and informal sector workers<sup>168</sup>.

### 3.2.5 Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

The government has implemented different stimulus programmes to assist the impacted economic sectors in light of the adverse effects of COVID-19. A series of stimulus programmes totalling over BDT one trillion, or roughly 3.7 per cent of Bangladesh's GDP, were announced. These packages were assigned for export-oriented industries, the service sector, CMSMEs, major businesses, the agriculture sector, and pre-shipment loan refinancing. These packages are primarily credit facilities offered by banks to firms.

The government set aside BDT 2,000 billion, or a portion of the stimulus, for women entrepreneurs operating CMSMEs. They receive five per cent of the entire allocation to CMSME, or BDT 10 billion.<sup>169</sup> It was much welcomed that the CMSME category has acknowledged the requirements of female entrepreneurs, particularly in light of the fact that these individuals have been calling for committed assistance in order to revitalize their companies.

The government also offered the relief packages which helped to provide food and cash support to low-income and impoverished households that have been most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. They include: (a) expanding the Social Safety Net Programmes' (SSNPs) coverage by USD 97 million; and (b) providing 5 million families with monthly financial help totalling roughly USD 30.150 million. The government broadened the initiatives for vulnerable

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<sup>166</sup> 141-Ministry of Textiles and Jute, *MBF Report 2024-25*, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/4705665b\\_b5b2\\_4e60\\_baca\\_04f41d26db0d/141\\_Textiles\\_English.pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/4705665b_b5b2_4e60_baca_04f41d26db0d/141_Textiles_English.pdf) (accessed October 07, 2024).

<sup>167</sup> National Skills Development Authority (NSDA), *National Action Plan 2022-2027 for Skills Development in Bangladesh*, 2022, (accessed October 07, 2024). [https://nsda.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/nsda.portal.gov.bd/page/79fe610e\\_04d6\\_4409\\_8331\\_1578b9a0e1d1/2022-11-28-14-55-14b0f8d58e53a1577422454fda3be908.pdf](https://nsda.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/nsda.portal.gov.bd/page/79fe610e_04d6_4409_8331_1578b9a0e1d1/2022-11-28-14-55-14b0f8d58e53a1577422454fda3be908.pdf)

<sup>168</sup> Ibid

<sup>169</sup> Fahmida Khatun, 'Women's access to stimulus packages and post Covid-19 gender equality', *The Daily Star*, 1 September 2020, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/macro-mirror/news/womens-access-stimulus-packages-and-post-covid-19-gender-equality-1953693>, (Accessed in 16 July 2024).



groups to include open market sales of rice at a price of BDT 10 per kilogramme as well as VGD and VGF.

The World Bank approved USD 1.05 billion on June 19, 2020, for three projects to assist Bangladesh in building resilience to future crises, accelerating the creation of high-quality jobs, and recovering economically from the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>170</sup>

The government's initiative to combat poverty is exemplified by the SWAPNO programme. Under the Local Government Division, SWAPNO is a social transfer programme that enables extremely impoverished women to provide community service that is vital to the social and economic well-being of rural areas. It helps severely impoverished rural women find work and avail employment opportunities. This is the most effective strategy to ensure inclusive growth and the alleviation of poverty. Through SWAPNO's intervention from July 2014 to June 2022, 12,492 households in Bangladesh's disaster-prone and impoverished districts saw a considerable improvement in their standards of living.<sup>171</sup>

With school closures and millions of children's educations disrupted, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major effect on education systems worldwide. Bangladesh was no exception with one of the longest school closures ever, spanning eighteen months. The Government of Bangladesh, with support from the World Bank, implemented the "COVID-19 School Sector Response" (CSSR) project (2020-2021).<sup>172</sup> Under the project, the school system became more resilient than it had before, supporting best practices in responding to and recovering from the pandemic. Over 5,000 digital resources covering a range of courses from pre-primary to grade 10 were made available to 3.26 million children through distance learning programs funded by the CSSR project. Approximately 3,000 educators underwent professional development training on online curriculum delivery, formative and summative assessments, remedial education, and promoting mental health and well-being in order to enhance their teaching practices in the post-pandemic environment. Subsidies for enhancing basic hygienic amenities were given to more than 19,500 government primary schools.

### 3.3 Freedom from violence, stigma, and stereotypes

**Critical areas of concern:** Violence against women, Human rights of women, Women and the media, The girl child.

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<sup>170</sup> World Bank Group, 'World Bank Provides Bangladesh over \$1 Billion to Create Quality Jobs and Respond to COVID 19 Pandemic', World Bank, 19 June 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/19/world-bank-provides-bangladesh-over-1-billion-to-create-quality-jobs-and-respond-to-covid-19-pandemic>, (Access in July 2024).

<sup>171</sup> United Nations Development Programme, 'Project Closing Report: Strengthening Women's Ability for Productive New Opportunities (SWAPNO)', Published in July 2022.

<sup>172</sup> World Bank, 'How Schools in Bangladesh Emerged as More Resilient after the COVID-19 Pandemic? - Bangladesh', 9 June 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/06/09/how-schools-in-bangladesh-emerged-as-more-resilient-after-the-covid-19-pandemic#:~:text=The%20schools%20used%20the%20resources,helped%20significantly%20reduce%20school%20dropouts>, (Accessed in July 2024).

### 3.3.1 Prioritized forms of gender-based violence for action

Over the past five years, Bangladesh government has prioritized the following forms of gender-based violence:

- Domestic violence committed by other family or household members,
- Sexual harassment and violence in public places, educational settings, and workplaces,
- Violence against women and girls facilitated by technology,
- Femicide/Feminicide/gender-related killings of women and girls,
- GBV against women in politics, including women’s human rights defenders,
- GBV in conflict-affected settings,
- Child, early and forced marriages,
- Trafficking in women and girls.

The government has prioritized the above forms of violence considering their prevalence in the society which are reported in various government and non-government surveys and reports. The media reports, analysis and narratives help to understand the trends and forms of violence which the government duly takes into account and undertake measures to address such forms of violence. The socio-economic status and the embedded cultural context of the country were also factors to understand and identify the forms of GBV. The dominant patriarchal attitude and culture is embedded into social norms that justify and accelerate various forms of GBV. By 2025, the government sets the target rate to reduce the rates of violence against women and girls to 30 per cent, and by 2030, to 15 per cent.<sup>173</sup>

The Violence against Women (VAW) Survey 2015 measures five forms of violence: physical violence, sexual violence, economic violence, emotional violence, and controlling behaviour. Almost two-thirds (72.6 percent) of ever-married women experienced one or more such forms of violence by their husbands at least once in their lifetime, and 57.7 percent of women experienced violence during the last 12 months. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 revealed that 25.4 per cent of women believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife for at least one of five specified reasons (burning food, argues, goes out without telling, neglecting children, or refusing sex). Child marriage remains prevalent. According to the Bangladesh Sample Statistics 2023, 8.2 per cent of women between the ages of 20-24 were married before their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday and 41.6 per cent of women between the ages of 20-24 were married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. In regard to human trafficking, women are at higher risk. For every 100,000 population, 0.63 women and 0.58 men were victims of human trafficking in 2019.<sup>174</sup> The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019 data revealed that only 10.3 per cent of women who experienced violence reported it to the police, with urban areas representing 12.20 per cent of reports and rural areas for 9.8 per cent.

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<sup>173</sup> General Economics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *Sustainable Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report 2022*, 2022, [https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b\\_4dc1\\_4744\\_be4a\\_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book\\_compressed.pdf](https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b_4dc1_4744_be4a_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book_compressed.pdf), (accessed August 2024)

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.



### 3.3.2 Prioritized actions to address gender-based violence

Prioritized actions to address GBV are guided primarily by the NRPD 2011, the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2018- 2030 and the National Action Plan to End Child Marriage 2018-2030. The NAP to Prevent Violence Against Women aims to establish a society free from violence against women and children by 2030 by improving the implementation of existing laws and policies against VAW and girls, increasing social awareness, improving socio-economic conditions of women and protection services as well as prevention and rehabilitation. Akin, the NAP to End Child Marriage commits to ending child marriage by 2041, reducing by one-third the rate of marriage for girls between the ages of 15 and 18 in 2021, and eliminating marriage for girls under the age of 15. Key priorities in the plan include empowering girl adolescents by increase their participation, life skills, access to modern facilities, and participation in decision making in family and community; enhancing awareness on the harmful consequences of child marriage and GBV to change social stereotyped mindset through community mobilization; and formulating and amending the laws and rules to eliminate child marriage and increase awareness of legal structure and legal remedies for girls whose rights are violated for child marriage.

The Government of Bangladesh has prioritized legislative amendments as a means to prevent and respond to GBV. The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 was amended in 2020, by introducing the death sentence as the highest punishment for rape. The amendment also substituted the word ‘raped’ by ‘rape victim’. The amendment aims to create stern examples of punishment for the perpetrators of rape offences. It is important to note that the amendment was made in respond to mass movement by people to ensure highest punishment for rape offenders. The Evidence Act 1872 was also amended in 2022, broadening the definition of ‘evidence’ to include physical or forensic evidence, including the admissibility of digital evidence by the court, as well as repealing Section 155(4) under which the prosecutrix of the rape case can be shown as of generally immoral character and amending Section 146(3) making questions about a rape victim’s character possible only with the court’s permission. This is a milestone amendment for survivors of GBV. Earlier, it was permissible to question a survivor’s character by asking degrading questions in the court which often led to victim-blaming and re-traumatization, as well as discouraging survivors to file cases. This new reform, following advocacy from CSOs, protects the dignity and privacy of the survivor, and thus, contributes to a more equitable and just legal process, that is more supportive to survivors.

Between 2018- April 2023, 96,278 cases have been filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000/Women and Children Repression Prevention (Amendment) Act 2020.<sup>175</sup> To expedite and ensure justice for women victims, a National Forensic DNA Profiling Laboratory and a DNA Screening Laboratory have been established in Medical College Hospitals located in seven divisions.<sup>176</sup>

The flagship “Multi-Sectoral Program to prevent violence against Women”, led by MoWCA in collaboration with the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs (MoLJPA), Ministry of

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<sup>175</sup> Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, GoB, Ninth Periodic Cycle of CEDAW Report Bangladesh, (2023) P. 25.

<sup>176</sup> Divisional DNA Screening Laboratory: Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women, <http://mspvaw.gov.bd/contain/36>

Information and Broadcasting (MoIB), MoSW, Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA), MoHFW, MoE, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology and Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperative, continues. One of the main objectives of the multi-sectoral programme is to develop the management aspect of prevention and protection of women oppression in Bangladesh through government and NGO cooperation. Components of the flagship programme including One-Stop-Crisis, One-Stop Crisis Cells, Trauma Counselling Centres, and the national hotline and app, among other.

The government runs nine One-Stop Crisis Centres at the public medical college hospitals to offer women and children who have been victims of violence health care, police support, DNA testing, social services, legal assistance, psychosocial counselling, and shelter services. In addition, 67 One-Stop Crisis Cells operate in upazila and district hospitals to coordinate different services both within and outside the hospitals for women and children who have been victims of abuse. The National Forensic DNA Profiling Laboratory provides necessary support to expedite trials for cases of abuse against women and children. In 2022, the government inaugurated Women Support Desk in 659 police station. This desk provides all types of legal assistance to women from all walks of life. This desk is run by a female officer with the rank of Sub-Inspector.

*Table 6 One-Stop Crisis Centre Clients (up to January 2024)*

Category	Total Cases
Physical Assault	38,503
Sexual Assault	23,980
Burn	538
Total	63,021
<b>No. of filed cases</b>	19,568
<b>No. of judgment announced</b>	2,199
<b>Cases where penalty imposed</b>	246

Source: Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women website, MoWCA

The MoWCA operates a National Helpline Centre for Violence against Women and Children in order to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women and children. From landlines and mobile devices, a Toll-Free Helpline 109 (ten-nine) is open around-the-clock. Through mobile, SMS, email, and fax, the helpline offers services to women and children who have been victims of violence in collaboration with local officials, government and non-government organizations, and administration. Additionally, this hotline aids in the prevention of sexual harassment and child marriage. A smartphone app called JOY (victory) has been developed to provide immediate assistance to women and children who have been the victims of violence. Using the apps, users can record conversations and take pictures of both victims and offenders. They can then send the audio and video recordings to the National Helpline Centre, nearby police stations, Deputy Police Commissioners in the Metropolitan Area, Police Superintendents in the relevant districts, and three

“Friends and Family” numbers with GPS locations. Currently, it is being tested in a few districts. The initiative aims to lower sexual violence, improve women's and children's social security, and boost social mobility for economic participation.

*Table 7 National Helpline Centre for Violence Against Women and Children Services (up to January 2024)*

Types of Services	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Medical Facilities	2000	1,231	992	836	124
Counselling	679	341	351	305	68
Police assistance	13,938	10,302	8,833	7,075	588
Legal Help	22,967	24,283	24,017	21,311	1,754
Information	318,246	366,830	687,792	909,062	71,254
Others	963,337	285,258	1,917	3,172	726
Total	1,321,167	688,245	723,902	941,761	74,514

Source: Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence Against Women website, MoWCA

### 3.3.3 Strategies used to prevent gender-based violence

Awareness raising constitutes one strategy adopted to prevent GBV, implemented alongside other efforts to prevent GBV, such as strengthening legislative provisions.

**2022 National 16 Days of Activism Campaign:** In line with the global annual campaign ‘16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence’, in 2022, MoWCA and MoYS, with support from the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), conducted a national campaign for preventing violence in both real and virtual spaces. The goal of the campaign was to reach 1.5 million youngsters, together with teenagers, parents, and members of the community. All children, including teenagers, were covered by the interventions in various settings, such as clubs located throughout 42 upazilas of the project areas. Along with other things, the program's main activities included: (a) dialogue with teenagers, parents, and community leaders; (b) role plays and drama on GBV and other child protection concerns; (c) awareness raising about GBV; and (d) public screening awareness. A total of 2,774,685 children, adolescents, parents, and community members were reached through 41,680 different events comprising the national campaign.

**2020 Campaign for Women’s Safety in Public Places:** The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the Centre for Research and Information (CRI)’s youth platform Young Bangla and UNDP, and UNDP carried out a campaign on “Women’s Safety in Public Places” in 2020. CRI led the joint campaign which involved civil society and the governmental sector collaborating together. The campaign was thoughtfully created to raise awareness of women's safety in the public spaces of Bangladesh.

### **3.3.4 Actions taken to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence**

In the last 10 years, Bangladesh has experienced a sharp increase in the infrastructure and use of information and communication technology (ICT), which has led to a rise in the prevalence of GBV that is aided by technology. These kinds of violence disproportionately affect groups that are already marginalized in Bangladeshi society, such as women and girls as well as members of ethnic and religious minorities. Legislative frameworks and programmes are presently in place to address the problem of GBV; however, there are significant gaps and implementation barriers, such as a lack of knowledge about the issue and the requirement for greater capacity to prevent and respond to violence in the form of GBV.

Bangladesh passed the Information Communication Technology Act 2006 and passed an amendment act in 2013 that established a Cyber Crimes Tribunal that addresses cases of cyber violence. In 2023, Bangladesh passed the Cyber Security Act 2023 to curb violent extremism and hate speech online. The Bangladesh police have opened a cyber wing to deal with the increasing number of cyber threats and it is responsible for monitoring cybercrimes and tracking the criminals. Additionally, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission is working to regulate and monitor cybercrime. This commission blocks inappropriate websites, blogs, and Facebook accounts. Moreover, the National Helpline 999 has expanded its scope to include reports of online abuse, while the government works with stakeholders to ensure social media platforms and tech companies respond more effectively to complaints of tech-facilitated violence. In an effort to raise awareness of digital crime, 1,325 educational institutions and 89,085 female students received training on "Girls Awareness in Digital Security" between FY 2016–2017 and FY 2021–2022.<sup>177</sup>

In 2020, the Bangladesh Police officially inaugurated the PCSW, a cyber-assistance programme offered only to women to support their pursuit of appropriate legal action. It provides women who are victims of cybercrime with essential technological support, and it raises and spreads awareness of issues linked to cyber security. The PCSW protects the privacy of the victim's information while offering support and services.

It should also be recognized that NGOs and CSOs are taking actions to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated GBV. For example, the Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust, a non-government organization, has assessed Bangladesh's current laws, identified limitations and gaps, and made recommendations to address cyber violence against girls.

### **3.3.5 Measures taken to resource women's organizations working to prevent and respond to GBV**

The government of Bangladesh has taken several measures to support and resource women's organizations working to prevent and respond to GBV. The government has provided financial grants and capacity-building support to local women's organizations, enabling them to expand

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<sup>177</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024*, 2023, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

their services for survivors of violence. These funds have been allocated to enhance community outreach, provide legal aid, and establish shelters for women escaping domestic violence.

Furthermore, the government has facilitated platforms for women's organizations to collaborate with law enforcement agencies and policymakers, ensuring their voices are included in the design and implementation of GBV prevention and response strategies. This multi-level support aims to strengthen the role of women's organizations in combating GBV and improving protection mechanisms for vulnerable women and girls across the country.

MoWCA are working with NGOs to reduce and mitigate GBV in Bangladesh. For example, the Bangladesh's Amrai Pari (WE CAN)<sup>178</sup> program aims to transform attitudes toward violence against women on a national level. By breaking the taboo, stigma, shame, and denial surrounding domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women, Amrai Pari (WE CAN) aims to raise awareness and hold perpetrators accountable. Diakonia<sup>179</sup> operates in partnership with NGOs in Bangladesh, it works to increase awareness and respect for human rights and gender equality, improving access to social and economic resources. The work is mostly carried out in the rural areas of the country. The ministry is also partnering with local NGOs and CSOs to implement various projects and programs. the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group also works to involves local NGOs in the network of the ministry.

### **3.3.6 Addressing the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media**

Over the past five years, Bangladesh has taken initiatives to strengthen legal and policy measures and enforce legal reforms to combat discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, including social media. The country supported the media industry by providing training to media professionals to encourage the creation and use of non-stereotypical, balanced, and diverse images of women and girls in the media, including social media. MoIB and its twelve departments or agencies provide necessary support and coordinate and monitor activities to prevent discrimination and gender bias in the media.

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission is responsible for implementing best practices for online telecommunication platforms, addressing security concerns regarding customer protection, national security, and online content, including discrimination, depictions of illegal or harmful substances, imitable behaviour, nudity, language, sex, violence, fear, threat, and other concerns. The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission formulated a Regulation for Digital, Social Media, and Over-the-Top Platforms in 2021 which seeks to address and regulate harmful content or obscene activities. This includes actions that compromise national security and those that undermine our common rights, obligations, and opportunities for promoting integration. The Regulation requires intermediaries, including social media intermediaries, to comply with a number of new requirements: Intermediaries must visibly publish the rules and regulations, privacy policy, and user agreement on their website or app. Terms of service should

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<sup>178</sup> We Can Bangladesh, 'About us - we can bangladesh', <<https://www.wecan-bd.org/about/>>, (Accessed 27 June 2024).

<sup>179</sup> Diakonia, 'Bangladesh' (*Diakonia EN*), <<https://www.diakonia.se/en/where-we-work/asia/bangladesh/>>, (Accessed 28 June 2024)

inform users “not to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, store, update or share any information” that: belongs to another person; is illegal, defamatory, obscene, pornographic, or intrusive of one’s privacy including bodily privacy; is harmful to children; threatens the unity, integrity, defence, security or sovereignty of the country, or its relations with other countries, public order (including communal and social harmony), or breaches the secrecy of the government; goes against Bangladesh’s liberation war and its spirit, national figures, anthem or flag; is offensive, false, humiliating or threatening, or hurts religious values; violates intellectual property rights; impersonates another person, is wilfully misleading or deceiving in nature, is patently false or untrue. The regulation is wide enough to prevent discriminatory content in social media that violates the rights of women and children.

Bangladesh has a robust legal and policy framework to prevent discriminatory content and gender bias in the media industry. The country is implementing the National Broadcasting Policy 2014, to ensure that mass media encourage and develop positive portrayal of women’s productive roles. The policy urges the media to create awareness among the public about women’s empowerment and other under-served communities. The specific provisions in the policy prohibit negative portrayal of women in the media, such as prohibition of broadcasting any program that encourages violence or discrimination towards women and children.

The Press Institute Bangladesh provided training to 30 female journalists including members of Bangladesh Nari Sangbadik Samity on fact-checking in 2022.<sup>180</sup> The training highlighted the techniques of writing reports via fact-checking, methods of fact-checking fake pictures and video images, monitoring fact-checking sites and verifying the authenticity of the news. In the context of Bangladesh where fake news and rumour occupy social media on a large scale, such training was considered essential to prevent misinformation and protect victims of such misinformation where women found to be the victims in most cases. Several NGOs, CSOs, and international organizations are also supporting efforts to improve positive media portrayals of women and girls, through trainings to journalists and media professions from various newspapers, TV shows, radio stations, news agencies, internet portals, advertising agencies, and youth organizations.

### **3.3.7 Actions taken specifically tailored to address violence against marginalized groups of women and girls**

Bangladesh is committed to upholding the principles of equality and non-discrimination outlined in the constitution while safeguarding and advancing the rights of women, children, minorities, and other marginalized groups. As such, specific actions have been taken to address violence against marginalized groups of women and girls.

**Women Migrant workers:** Through the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, as well as 30 labour welfare wings in Bangladesh embassies around the world, Bangladesh continues to protect and defend the rights of migrant workers. A ten-point "Paradigm Shift Agenda" to enhance migrant worker welfare and abroad employment is included in the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan 2020-2025. To control recruitment agents, the Overseas Employment and Migrants

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<sup>180</sup> Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, ‘[2-day training workshop for women journalists held at PIB](https://www.bssnews.net/news/98614)’, 7 December 2022, <https://www.bssnews.net/news/98614>, (Accessed in July 2024).



(recruitment Agents' Licence and Conduct) Rules 2019 were passed. The "Prabhas Bandhu call centre", a hotline service, was established in 2022 to address the grievances and issues of migrant labourers, particularly those who are female.<sup>181</sup> An app called "Amiprobashi" was launched in 2021 to provide information services to migrant workers. During COVID-19, the Ami Probashi app gave workers ways to protect their own health and safety while also ensuring that they had the required immunization records to pursue employment overseas.

At the sub district level, 23-person Vigilance Task Forces have been established to carry out field-level surveillance and monitoring in the fight against illegal immigration, human trafficking, and dangerous immigration.<sup>182</sup> By creating a "Women Workers Protection Cell," special attention has been paid to the safety of female employees. The Bangladesh government is committed to take steps to make sure that female migrant workers have access to communication tools, like cell phones, at work so they may get in touch with the Bangladesh mission when needed.

**Rohingya Refugees/FDMN:** The Government of Bangladesh has undertaken several initiatives address violence against Rohingya refugees/FDMN, working in collaboration with international organizations and NGOs. Recognizing the heightened vulnerability of Rohingya women to GBV, the government, has supported the establishment of Women-Friendly Spaces, where survivors of violence can access healthcare, psychosocial support, and legal aid. The government has also worked to strengthen the capacities of law enforcement and camp authorities, ensuring that cases of violence are reported and addressed more effectively. Furthermore, efforts have been made to prevent violence by engaging men and boys through gender-sensitization programs, promoting a more supportive and protective environment for women and girls within the camps. Additionally, the regional trauma counselling centre and a one-stop crisis cell has supported 142,837 Rohingya women and children through counselling services provided by trauma centres and mental health care centres.<sup>183</sup>

### 3.4 Participation, accountability, and gender-responsive institutions

**Critical areas of concern:** Women in power and decision-making, Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, Human rights of women, Women and the media, The girl child.

#### 3.4.1 Promoting women's participation in public life and decision-making

Bangladesh serves as an example of a nation where women have prominent positions public life and decision-making fora, including in the national legislature and the government. Over the past five years, women have held the positions of Prime Minister, Deputy Leader of the House, and Speaker of the National Parliament.

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<sup>181</sup> Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, *4<sup>th</sup> Cycle Universal Periodic Review, 'National Report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and 16/21, Bangladesh'*, General Assembly, Forty-fourth session, UN Doc A/HRC/WG.6/44/BGD/1, (1 September 2023), <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/178/07/pdf/g2317807.pdf>, (accessed August 2024)

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.



Progress in women's participation in public life and decision-making has been supported by constitutional and legal provisions, including quotas. For example, 50 out of the 250 seats in the Parliament are reserved for women as stipulated in Article 65 (3A) of the Constitution, of the 350 seats in Parliament, 50 are reserved for women. Similarly, the NWDP 2011 seeks to raise the number of women's seat in the Parliament to 33 per cent and to take initiative to direct election in the extended seats for women. In Bangladesh's parliamentary history, the number of directly elected female Members of Parliament (MPs) peaked in the country's eleventh parliamentary election, with 73 female MPs. In the latest 12th Parliamentary Election in January 2024, 96 female candidates participated, the highest female participation in history. Over the past years, there has also been a notable growth in the engagement of women in local government activities, particularly in Union Parishad polls. In the 2021-2022 Union Parishad polls, 45 of 4,058 Union Parishads (1.1%), resulted in female candidates in the chairperson posts, an increase from the 26 female candidates (0.64%) who won in the Union Parishad polls in 2016, out of 4,087 Union Parishads.<sup>184</sup> To increased participation of women, one-third of the seats in Union Councils and Upazila Parishads are reserved for women.

The Ministry of Public Administration (MoPA) has been instrumental in promoting the advancement of women in public administration. Over the years, MoPA has ensured women's representation across the field level to the highest policy level of the government. Expanded women-friendly welfare programmes have offered female employees additional support, enabling their participation and representation in public administration. The Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre, Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy, National Planning and Development Academy, and Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management Foundation have offered training programs, of which 3,047 female employees have been trained.<sup>185</sup> One-time grants of welfare and mutual insurance have been provided from the Government Employees Welfare Board to 5,802 women, which is 80.64 per cent of the total recipients.<sup>186</sup> Female employees have also accessed short-term training and higher education abroad through the Government Servant Capacity Building Program.

Women's increased participation and representation has been seen across public life and decision-making roles across sectors. The per centage of female employees in the scheduled banks was 16.29 per cent of the total employees in 2022 and has increased to 16.35 per cent in 2023 as a result of the close monitoring by the Bangladesh Bank.<sup>187</sup> Both the military and the civil sector are appointing female officers to senior posts, including as major generals. In addition, women are currently holding positions such as secretaries, judges of higher courts, and vice chancellors of universities. Women are entering the foreign service in a larger percentage than ever before. In 2024, eight women ambassadors were serving outside Bangladesh in different countries, and increase from five in 2017. At present there are five female principals in private medical colleges

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<sup>184</sup> Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, '*Increased women leadership masks barriers that females face in their uplift*', 5 January 2024, <https://www.bssnews.net/news/166568#:~:text=Increased%20women%20leadership%20breaks%20the,females%20and%20their%20financial%20hardship>, (Accessed in July 2024)

<sup>185</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024, 2023*, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Information obtained from Bangladesh Bank, July 2024.

and one in government medical college, an increased by seven per cent and 0.03 per cent respectively between the years of 2016 to 2022.

Various advocacy campaigns by the government, in partnership with civil society and media, have raised awareness about the importance of women's leadership and participation in public life.

### **3.4.2 Increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media**

Bangladesh has taken considerable steps to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT). The Government of Bangladesh has placed a strong focus on the use of information technology in many spheres, including business, education, agriculture, social and political activities, and the advancement of women's empowerment in media.

ICTD has carried out a number of initiatives to enhance access, affordability and use of ICTs for women and girls. The “Her Power” project (July 2022-June 2025), has prioritized freelancing activities across the country in four categories including women freelancers, women IT service providers, women e-commerce professionals and women call centre agents. The “Tottho Apa: Empowering Women Through ICT Towards Digital Bangladesh” project (2nd Phase-2017-2022) has provided easy access to information technology for under-privileged women in rural areas and empowered them through IT enabled services, with 490 female Information Service Officers and 980 female Information Service Assistants employed for 490 Information Centres across the country.

Women's representation in the MoIB has increased, across levels. Between FY2023-2024 and FY2024-2025 alone, women's representation increased from 15.9 per cent to 17.3 per cent, an increase of more than 200 female employees. The National Institute of Mass Media (NIMM) has conducted various training sessions on topics such as mass media, news and program production, modern journalism, and the SDGs, with significant involvement of women. The NIMM has ensured the participation of at least 20-25 per cent of women trainees in training programs on gender issues, implementation of CEDAW, etc.<sup>188</sup> The Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) has also initiated programs such as the BASIS Women's Forum, empowering women to pursue ICT careers.

Media continues to play a critical role in shifting discriminatory social norms, through the production and broadcasting of quality and audience friendly programs aimed at increasing awareness of women's rights and gender equality. Bangladesh Betar broadcasts 1.23 hours of programs and Bangladesh Television broadcasts 37.80 minutes of programs daily on women's development from various stations.<sup>189</sup> Employment opportunities are also being created for women through their engagement as artists and producers in these programs. Moreover, MoIB are

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<sup>188</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, ‘Gender Budget Report: 2024-2025, Extended part of Chapter V’, Published in June 2024, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/98c2d08b\\_5cdc\\_4a69\\_9c5f\\_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20\(2024-25\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/98c2d08b_5cdc_4a69_9c5f_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20(2024-25).pdf), (Accessed in July 2024).

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

organized regular courtyard meetings, community meetings, small and fragmented gatherings, women's gatherings, film screenings, articles publishing, documentaries, and features on women's development. These activities are making an important contribution to the development of the socioeconomic status of women.

In 2023, MoIB initiated the “Communication and Awareness Building for Children, Adolescents, and Women Issues” project (2023-2027). The project has contributed to a significant change in the social and behavioural patterns, reducing discrimination against women and children. The Bangladesh Radio and Television are producing dramas, songs, gambhiras, spots jingles, discussion meetings, field base reporting, outdoor programs, debating competitions, Aami Mina Bolsi, weekly dramas, direct phone-in programs, on women development. They are also imparting training and broadcasting programs on special days for the encouragement of children and women to participate in social development activities.

### **3.4.3 Current national women’s machinery**

MoWCA, is the lead ministry mandated to advance women's and children's rights, with the mission of establishing the rights of women and children, and women empowerment, through mainstreaming gender in development.<sup>190</sup> Being the coordinator for the government on issues of women’s equality and development, the ministry promotes a broader and more consistent response by all Government agencies to the needs and priorities of women. The ministry operates through four distinct affiliated departments and agencies: the Department of Women Affairs (DWA), the Bangladesh Shishu (Children) Academy, the Joyeeta Foundation, and the Jatiya Mahila Shangstha (JMS), a national women organization. Within MoWCA, the Policy Leadership Advocacy Unit (PLAU), functions as a technical unit, established to make government interventions for women's development more robust and effective through multi-dimensional sector-based collaboration.

In addition to the above, several mechanisms are in place to ensure strong coordination and gender mainstreaming.

**The National Council for the Development of Women and Children:** The National Council for Women and Children Development (NCWCD) was established in 2009. The council is mandated to oversee and guide the activities of MoWCA and others on gender equality and child-development. The 55 members committee is headed by the Prime Minister and consists of: the chairpersons of Bangladesh Shishu Academy and JMS, eight members of parliament, fifteen secretaries of ministries and divisions, two members of the Planning Commission, the Director General of DWA, and seven women nominated by the government. The council provides policy guidance and directives on safety and protection on women and children.

**Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women and Children Affairs:** The advancement of women as per National Women Development Policy is being examined by a ten-person Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women and Children Affairs. As the member secretary, MoWCA leads the Committee, which typically convenes once a month.

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<sup>190</sup> Ministry of Women and Children Affairs website, <https://mowca.gov.bd/>, (accessed 8 July 2024).

**Women’s Development Implementation and Evaluation Committee:** Under the direction of the State Minister of the MoWCA, the Women’s Development Implementation and Evaluation Committee, is a 35-member committee representing various ministries, divisions, and civil society to oversee the implementation of the action plan concerning women’s advancement. The Committee convenes every six months. The MoWCA secretary serves as the member secretary.

**The Women in Development Focal Points Mechanism:** All ministries and divisions are responsible for integrating and mainstreaming actions to address women’s empowerment and gender equality in their programs. To this end, the WID focal points mechanism was established by the Fourth Five Year Plan 1990-1995. Each ministry or division is required to designate a joint secretary-level official as the WID focal point. The WID focal points are responsible for ensuring that gender equality and women’s empowerment is taken into account in the policies, plans, and programs of their respective ministries/divisions. Currently, there are 55 WID focal points representing various agencies of the government. MoWCA is attempting to transform the focal point mechanism for all ministries into a gender desk in order to promote sustainability.

The total budget allocation to MoWCA has increased over the past five years, underscoring a sustained and strategic emphasis on financing for transformative projects to advance gender equality. The total budget increased from BDT 419.1 billion in FY2021-2022 to BDT 522.2 billion in FY2024-2025, with approximately 90 per cent gender relevant allocation.<sup>191</sup>

### **3.4.4 Other mechanisms and tools used to mainstream gender equality across sectors**

Various mechanisms and tools are employed to effectively mainstream gender equality across sectors, ensuring that the principles of equity and inclusivity are integrated into all areas of development and governance. Three examples of coordination mechanisms are outlined below.

**Local Consultative Group on Women's Advancement and Gender Equality:** The Local Consultative group on Women’s Advancement and Gender Equality (LCG WAGE), constituting one of the thematic working groups within the Local Consultative Group (LCG) mechanism, the primary coordination mechanism between the Government of Bangladesh and development partners, including donor agencies, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The LCG platform aims to enhance the effectiveness of development aid, align development assistance with national priorities, and ensure better coordination across sectors to achieve sustainable development goals. The LCG WAGE is chaired by MoWCA, with UN Women and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as co-chairs. The LCG WAGE focuses specifically on promoting gender equality and women's advancement. It works to integrate gender perspectives across various sectors and development initiatives, ensuring that policies, programs, and resources are effectively contributing to women's empowerment.

**Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group:** In order to guarantee the successful mainstreaming of gender equality in humanitarian action, the inter-cluster Gender in Humanitarian

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<sup>191</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, ‘Gender Budget Report: 2024-2025, Extended part of Chapter V’, Published in June 2024, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/98c2d08b\\_5cdc\\_4a69\\_9c5f\\_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20\(2024-25\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/98c2d08b_5cdc_4a69_9c5f_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20(2024-25).pdf), (Accessed in July 2024).

Action Working Group (GiHA WG) was founded in February 2017 with the support of the Department of Women Affairs and the Humanitarian Coordination Task Team (HCTT) in Bangladesh. With the objective to ensure that the nation's overall disaster response and preparation activities are meeting the gendered demands of the population, the goal of the GiHA WG is to assist the efforts of each theme cluster and inter-cluster working group to implement gender responsive humanitarian programming. The group is made up of focal points from several thematic clusters, working groups from HCTT, and other entities that support humanitarian relief and gender equity. The GiHA WG is comprised of representatives from relevant government ministries and departments, such as MoWCA and MoDMR, UN agencies, development partners, NGOs and CSOs. The GiHA WG in Bangladesh has offered capacity building support, technical advice, and guidance for delivering gender responsive aid in humanitarian actions. For example, the GiHA WG has produced several Rapid Gender Analyses on natural hazards and the COVID-19 over the past five years, which have been crucial in addressing gender concerns in humanitarian response preparations; facilitated the collection of sex, age, and disability disaggregated data (SADDD) data and the localization of gender issues by establishing strong connections and coordinating information sharing with the National Assessment Working Group, GBV, Health and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Education, Food Security, Shelter, and WASH cluster; and contributed to reviewing and updating of Joint Need Assessment tools from a gender lens.

**Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee on Preventing Dowry and Violence Against Women:** This committee, chaired by the State Minister of MoWCA, reviews and coordinates the activities of all committees, organizations, and institutions of Bangladesh that are working to address violence against women and children. The committee offers help to the victims through monitoring the activities of the police and other agencies. Through its semi-annual meetings, it monitors whether all ministries and divisions have formed sexual harassment prevention committees as per the Honourable High Court rule and made it effective. The Committee is composed of representatives from civil society and the ministries. All groups and organizations involved in VAW have their programs reviewed and coordinated by the Committee.

### **3.4.5 National human rights institution and the measures taken addressing violations of women's rights**

As per National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009 the NHRC was established, constituted by seven members, of whom at least one is a woman, and one is from a minority community. The NHRC, led by the Chairperson, is the primary institution that oversees human rights implementation and has secured 'B'-status rating by the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Right Institutions. The NHRC has investigative power *suo moto* to probe into any alleged violation of human rights; to summon explanation from the law enforcing agencies and public authorities; visit prisons or correctional centres; lodge writ petitions to the High Court Division on behalf of an aggrieved person; and exercise the powers of a civil court while conducting any inquiry. NHRC has set up an online Complaints Management System.

The NHRC has approved its third Five Year Strategic Plan 2022–2026, which focuses on eight human rights priority areas, following a series of meetings with stakeholders, including the media and civil society organizations. Between 2018-2022, NHRC resolved 3,666 human rights

complaints while 364 complaints were ongoing at the end of 2022.<sup>192</sup> To speed up its actions and interventions, the 5th Commission, which was established in September 2020, introduced e-Filing.<sup>193</sup> The NHRC has developed a digital complaint management system that is usable by everyone, including those with disabilities. The NHRC has reactivated the Human Rights Focal Desks (HRFD) of the government in the ministries and formed HRFDs at the Offices of the Divisional Commissioners and the Deputy Commissioner.<sup>194</sup> The Commission has re-appointed the panel lawyers for their advice on legal and human rights issues and represent NHRC on legal and human rights issues. With the aim of outreach to the people the NHRC has formed District Human Rights (Prevention and Protection) Committees in 64 districts of Bangladesh with a combination of the State institutions and non-State actors.<sup>195</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission maintained a database on the allegation of human rights violations, formed fact finding committees on 14 August 2020 wherever needed, and made recommendations to the concerned authorities for appropriate actions.<sup>196</sup>

In order to address violence against women, including rape during the COVID-19 pandemic, the NHRC established a National Inquiry Committee to carry out a National Inquiry into Violence against Women and Children, with a focus on rape.<sup>197</sup> The committee's goals are to identify the root cause, trends, obstacles, and suggestions for stakeholders to address rape. In 2020, NHRC also launched the 'Women's Safety in Public Places' campaign to raise awareness among young people and other key actors about women's safety concerns in order to promote positive perception, attitude, and behaviour change for equal rights of women and girls. It also attempted to spread the required legislative changes to fully handle harassment and violence against women in public spaces. An information-dissemination action plan, stakeholder capacity-building training, and advocacy for legislative and policy reform comprised the campaign.

Bangladesh closely collaborates with UN human rights procedures, particularly those of the Human Rights Council (HRC) and treaty body processes. Bangladesh's five-time membership in the HRC is evidence of her contribution to the body. Bangladesh has also demonstrated that it is a very active delegation to the HRC by its discussions, resolutions, and participation in several procedures as rapporteur. In the past five years, Bangladesh has hosted seven Special Procedures mandate holders, the highest among all UN Member States. These include the Special Rapporteur (SR) on Human Rights Situation in Myanmar (2020 and 2021), the SR on human rights and climate change (2022), the SR on trafficking in persons, especially women and children (2022), the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of Human Rights by Older Persons (2022), the SR on the human rights of migrants (2023), the SR on discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and

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<sup>192</sup> Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, *4<sup>th</sup> Cycle Universal Periodic Review, 'National Report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and 16/21, Bangladesh'*, General Assembly, Forty-fourth session, UN Doc A/HRC/WG.6/44/BGD/1, (1 September 2023), <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/178/07/pdf/g2317807.pdf>, (accessed August 2024)

<sup>193</sup> National Human Rights Commission, *'Human Rights for All Everywhere Equally: National Human Rights Commission, 3rd Five Year Strategic Plan 2022-27'*, [https://nhrc.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/nhrc.portal.gov.bd/page/535c363f\\_91a8\\_40b6\\_b58a\\_714954c85b4e/2022-10-18-04-28-ec218ec406fc02be70e9f982e4b2af89.pdf](https://nhrc.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/nhrc.portal.gov.bd/page/535c363f_91a8_40b6_b58a_714954c85b4e/2022-10-18-04-28-ec218ec406fc02be70e9f982e4b2af89.pdf), (accessed July 2024).

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

their family members (2023), and the SR on extreme poverty and human rights (2023). Bangladesh also hosted five visits of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. In 2022, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights paid a visit to Bangladesh at the government's request. It was the UN Human Rights Chief's first official visit.

### **3.5 Peaceful and inclusive societies**

**Critical areas of concern:** Women and armed conflict, Human rights of women, The girl child

#### **3.5.1 Implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda**

Bangladesh was the 83rd member state of the United Nations (UN) to adopt a national action plan following the 10 resolutions on women, peace, and security by the Security Council, from Resolution 1325 in 2000 to number 2493 in 2019. Bangladesh is a pioneer when it comes to women, peace, and security agenda. It played a key role in the adoption of Resolution 1325 which, for the first time, called for the meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Bangladesh has contributed to the global normative framework and the implementation of 1325 Resolution by adopting a National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (NAP WPS) 2019-2022, extended till 2025.

The NAP WPS reinforces Bangladesh's continued efforts in establishing peace and security within and beyond its border by ensuring women's greater role in peacekeeping, peacebuilding, disaster management, prevention of violence against women and preventing violent extremism among others. The NAP WPS enhances and builds on Bangladesh's experience and achievements over the past decades. It was formulated through a series of consultations within the government and with civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's organizations at grassroot and national levels. The NAP divides the principles enshrined in the UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution into the following broad categories: (i) prevention (ii) participation (iii) protection, relief, and recovery, and accordingly sets out objectives to be achieved under each category and activities to be conducted in order to achieve said objectives. The NAP also provides implementation strategies and plans with the support of a coordination group led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA).

Over the past five years, the members of the Inter-Ministerial Coordination Group (IMCG), being responsible to implement the activities under the NAP WPS, have taken some initiatives and programmes.

MoFA, as the lead ministry formed the IMCG as per the NAP and organized its first meeting in November 2021. The IMCG agreed to nominate NAP WPS focal persons from each ministry and department or division. MoFA is preparing and reviewing the Terms of References for the IMCG and is also formulating the reporting and monitoring template with technical support from UN Women. MoFA, in collaboration with UN Women, has undertaken a study on 'Mapping of existing research on gender and violent extremism and identifying the roles women play in preventing violent extremism' in 2022.



MoLJPA has undertaken a research project on ‘Legislative research for identification of discriminatory provision in existing laws’. The research was conducted in the light of constitutional and human rights norms while assessing the compatibility of the laws and policies with SDG 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies, which refers to promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws. The research applied a gender lens while analysing the laws.

With an overarching objective to promote the women, peace and security agenda, the government is committed to strengthen adequate response mechanisms and capacities to ensure the safety and security of women and girls in a gender-sensitive manner especially in emergency situations. This includes having an adequate number of qualified women in the security sector and having zero-tolerance policies and procedures in place to address sexual exploitation and abuse. Bangladesh was one of 54 countries that endorsed the new global Political Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict (PSVI), at the Ministerial Conference on PSVI hosted in the United Kingdom in 2022. The Political Declaration sets out how states will work together to strengthen the global prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence.

The implementation of the NAP WPS is supported by the work of NGOs and CSOs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) implemented a short-term project titled ‘**Creating Space for Accelerating Peace and Security**’ (January-March 2021) to enhance knowledge and understanding of the NAP WPS, focusing on its implementation and monitoring. BNPS developed a three-day training module to build the capacity of CSOs and women-led groups on monitoring national and local-level activities of the NAP WPS, training 120 women. Additionally, eight consultations were held at district and national levels to discuss NAP WPS implementation, involving over 120 participants from civil society, government, academia, and the media. BNPS also organized a discussion titled “Bangladesh’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security” on March 18, 2021. The discussion reflects on the implementation challenges and ways forward.

### **3.5.2 Increasing the leadership, representation, and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding**

Gender equality and the development of an inclusive and long-lasting peace process are priorities included in the NAP WPS. It offers a structure to guarantee women's significant involvement in averting violence and extremism in Bangladesh. In order to encourage resilience in times of crisis, it also contains measures for the defence and enhancement of women's rights.

The NAP incorporates success indicators together with time-bound activities to promote women's rights and participation. By guaranteeing women's increased participation in peacekeeping, peacebuilding, disaster management, humanitarian response, and violent extremism prevention, among other things, the NAP supports Bangladesh's ongoing efforts to establish peace and security both inside and outside of its borders.

The Bangladesh Police Women Network (BPWN) launched its Strategic Plan 2021-2023 in September 2021. The Strategic Plan aims to ensure stronger gender equality within the police force through meaningful participation, representation, contribution, progression, and empowerment of women police officials, as well as safety and security of women and girls across communities. It

also acts as an important stepping stone for Bangladesh Police to fulfil its commitments within the NAP WPS 2019-2025 in line with UNSC Resolution 1325. The Strategic Plan helps empower women police officials to express their collective concerns and guide the creation of a framework to address gender issues through the network. The specific aims of the plan include:

1. Maximizing women's contributions within Bangladesh Police.
2. Increasing representation of women in Bangladesh Police across all ranks and departments.
3. Supporting the development and progression of women throughout Bangladesh Police.
4. Promoting an appropriate working environment for women across Bangladesh Police.
5. Maximizing the contribution of the BPWN in supporting Bangladesh Police to provide a gender-responsive policing service, thereby improving the safety and security of women and girls within communities.

The government inaugurated one-stop service desks for women, children, and people with disabilities in 659 police stations in 2020.<sup>198</sup> A specially trained woman sub-inspector runs the desk with other skilled female officers. The desk provided services to 3,444,000 people in 2021.<sup>199</sup> This initiative of the Bangladesh Police helps women avail legal aid services to fight against prejudices that they are facing in the society.

Bangladesh contributes significantly to establishing peace and security internationally as the top contributor to the UN peacekeeping operations. With a contribution of 5,866 uniformed personnel to the UN mandate of peacekeepers, Bangladesh occupies the 4th position in 2024 among contributing countries in the world.<sup>200</sup> This includes experts on mission, formed police units, individual police, staff officers, and troops. Bangladesh has increased its female personnel contribution over the past five years, demonstrating its commitment to WPS.

Starting its journey in Civilian Police (CIVPOL) back in 2000, Bangladesh women police are contributing with exemplary dedication in the Peacekeeping Mission, including CIVPOL/UN Police (UNPOL), Secondment and Formed Police Units (FPU), which has placed them as key driving force in promoting social cohesion in different areas of conflict. Bangladesh, being the top contributor of female police officers to the UN peacekeeping operations as Formed Police Unit, has become a crucial partner in the transition from war to peace. Bangladesh female peacekeepers have placed themselves as key driving forces to reduce GBV, conflict and confrontation, providing a sense of security especially for women and children, mentoring female police officers in the local area and thus empowering women in the host country and promoting social cohesion. Consequently, the demand for Bangladesh female Police Officers is increasing in the UN peacekeeping operations.

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<sup>198</sup> BSS, Dhaka, 'PM opens 'Service Desk' at 659 police stations', *The Daily Star*, 10 April 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/governance/news/pm-opens-service-desk-659-police-stations-3001941>, (accessed June 2024)

<sup>199</sup> Roundtables, 'Implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security', *The Daily Star*, 13 June 2022, [Implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security | The Daily Star](https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/governance/news/implementation-of-the-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security), (accessed July 2024).

<sup>200</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, 'Troop and police contributors', <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>, (accessed 24 June 2024).

Table 8 Presently deployed female peacekeepers as of May 2024

Mission Category		Person
FPU	MONUSCO-1	77
	MINUSMA-1	32
IPO & UN Job	UNJOB/UNPOL	10
<b>Total</b>		<b>119</b>

Source: Bangladesh Police Women Network website

Table 9 Total female police peacekeepers from 2000 to till 2024

Mission Category	Person
FPU	1715
IPU/UNPOL/Secondment	92
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,807</b>

Source: Bangladesh Police Women Network website

The Bangladesh Armed forces have played a significant role in women’s empowerment by employing women as peacekeepers in field missions. So far, a total of 962 female peacekeepers from Bangladesh Armed Forces participated in the UN peace operation.<sup>201</sup> Currently 415 female members from Bangladesh Armed Forces are deployed in different peacekeeping missions.<sup>202</sup> The UN has set a target of deploying 18 per cent women as Staff Officer and Military Observer in UN peacekeeping operations.<sup>203</sup> Bangladesh is near to reach 18 per cent and will further increase the women participation beyond 18 per cent in years ahead. Since 2019, the Bangladesh Army has started deploying “Female Engagement Team” (FET), in every battalion to make peacekeeping and peace-building more effective in conflict areas. Additionally, the Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training provides training and courses on WPS, including a Female Military Officers course, Gender Adviser course, and FET training as part of pre-deployment training. Gender training is also offered at pre-deployment training.

Bangladesh continues to promote women’s meaningful participation and gender mainstreaming in humanitarian and crisis response. A dedicated GiHA WG exists for the Rohingya refugee response in Cox’s Bazar to provide cross-sectoral and inter-organizational support to ensure the integration of gender aspects in humanitarian action. The GiHA WG in Cox’s Bazar has five key focus areas

<sup>201</sup> Armed Forces Division, Prime Minister’s Office, *Female Participation of Bangladesh in UN Peace Operation*, <https://afd.gov.bd/un-peacekeeping/female-participation>, (accessed 8 July 2024).

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

including i) coordination, ii) technical advice, guidance, and capacity development, iii) advocacy, iv) assessment, analysis, and monitoring, v) information sharing and management. Gender is also mainstreamed across the Protection Sector response, as explicitly outlined in the 2024 Joint Response Plan, by ensuring that more women and girls, persons with disabilities, and other diverse population groups exercise their voice and leadership in the response.<sup>204</sup>

Over the past five years, some notable achievements that have benefitted include, the endorsement of a multi-year Family Planning Strategy 2022-2025 by the MoHFW, outlining an approach to increase the demand for modern contraceptive methods through community-based family planning interventions and facility-based family planning services among women and girls of Rohingya and surrounding host communities; the endorsement of the ‘Government of Bangladesh-United Nations Framework on Skills Development for Rohingya refugees/ Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) and Host Communities’ in 2022 and the subsequent establishment of the livelihoods and Skills Development Sector to operationalize the framework; issuance of new ‘Guidance on the Engagement of Volunteers for the Rohingya Refugee/FDMN Camps’, enabling refugees to participate in the response and support their communities while benefitting from equitable engagement processes and standardized stipend rates; and engagement, coordination and capacity building of field-level actors contributed to sustainable, localized, community-based protection, increased awareness, and better service provision.<sup>205</sup>

### **3.5.3 Accountability for violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of conflicts and crisis**

To redress and prevent violations of rights of women, Bangladesh has a robust accountability mechanism that includes both administrative and judicial measures.

**Strengthening institutional capacities of the justice system:** To ensure basic access to justice during the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual courts were established through the Use of Information Communication Technology by Court Act 2020, strengthening women’s access to justice. Between May 2020- August 2022, 314,842 bail petitions were heard through virtual courts and bail was granted to 158,507 individuals.<sup>206</sup> Various digital solutions such as SMS notification to witnesses, online cause list, judicial monitoring dashboard, and the MyCourt mobile app have been introduced to enhance the judicial process. To reduce case backlogs, Bangladesh has introduced a range of digital tools to streamline judicial services in subordinate courts, such as the Online Cause List, Judicial Monitoring Dashboard, and the MyCourt mobile app. As a result, the efficiency of case processing has significantly improved, with the national average case disposal rate now reaching 95%.<sup>207</sup> It is worth noting that the virtual court app has included the cases for Nari o Shishu Nirjatan Daman Tribunals on priority basis. Additionally, new positions have been created

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<sup>204</sup> Government of Bangladesh and the United Nations in Bangladesh, *Joint Response Plan – Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis* 2024, 2024, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/JRP%202024.pdf>, (accessed July 2024).

<sup>205</sup> Inter Sector Coordination Group, *2023 Report on the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis, Bangladesh*, [https://rohingyaresponse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/bangladesh\\_2023\\_jrp\\_rhc\\_appeal\\_en-1.pdf](https://rohingyaresponse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/bangladesh_2023_jrp_rhc_appeal_en-1.pdf), (accessed August 2024).

<sup>206</sup> Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, *4<sup>th</sup> Cycle Universal Periodic Review, ‘National Report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and 16/21, Bangladesh’*, General Assembly, Forty-fourth session, UN Doc A/HRC/WG.6/44/BGD/1, (1 September 2023), <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g23/178/07/pdf/g2317807.pdf>, (accessed August 2024)

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

for 381 court and tribunal judges, 56 magistrates, and 529 court staff to strengthen the administration of justice since 2019.<sup>208</sup>

**Strengthening capacity of security sector institutions on human rights and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence:** The Bangladesh Police Academy being the apex training institute of the Bangladesh Police regularly conducts training on human rights. The institute offers holistic knowledge, skill, and attitude in policing with a view to introducing the police officers with the criminal justice system and contemporary laws, rules, and regulations. The courses under different components of training program include preventing violence against women, human rights, gender consciousness and social responsibility, resistance to human trafficking, and prevention of women and child abuse. The training curriculum also includes courses on investigation, forensics, and financial crimes to meet the challenges of modern-day policing. The course on human rights is embedded in all the curriculum of basic training for Assistant Superintendent of Police (Probationers), Sub-Inspectors and Trainee Recruit Constables.

In addition, the Police Staff College has incorporated human rights courses in their training curriculum for junior and senior police officers as well as officers of other agencies operating under the MoHA, such as Corrections officers, Fire Service and Civil Defence Officers, and Department of Narcotics Control Officers, among others. The courses are: Management Course on Human Rights and Key International Issues for Senior Police Officers; Police Management and Human Rights Course, Human Rights and Law Enforcement Course, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, International Human Rights Law and Community Policing, Methods of Combating Human Trafficking Course, Training of Trainers (TOT) on Human Rights and Human Rights Training for the Public Order Management Commanders. The legal and human rights aspects of violence against women under the Prevention of Suppression Against Women and Children Act of 2000 and the Domestic Violence Act 2010 have been integrated into the training curriculum of the judicial staff and law enforcing agencies.

**Increasing access of conflict-affected, refugee or displaced women to violence prevention and protection services:** The government continues to provide necessary services for the Rohingya refugees who are victims of a protracted conflict. The one stop crisis cell and a regional trauma counselling centre in Cox's Bazar provided services to 142,837 Rohingya women and children, till date. Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Office in Cox's Bazar, the Bangladesh's government office in charge of providing relief to Rohingya refugees/FDMN, is working in collaboration with UN organizations, international NGOs, and local NGOs to reduce GBV in the camps. The RRRC has prioritized strong partnerships, investment, coordination, and strong communication system to ensure services for GBV survivors to improve gender equality and the rights of women in the camps. The GBV Sub-Sector, led by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) works in close collaboration with the Child Protection Sub-Sector (led by UNICEF) within the Protection Sector, led by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The sub-sector works to prevent and respond to GBV through strengthening community-based GBV programming.

**Measures to combat trafficking of women and children:** Bangladesh has prepared its first ever 'National Study on Trafficking in Persons' in 2022 which was led by MoHA. The study was

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

prepared in a collaborative manner under the “Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants – Bangladesh” (GLO.ACT) project which is led by the Public Security Division and jointly implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and International Organization for Migration (IOM). The study presents an analysis in the form of a national overview of the trends, patterns and flows of trafficking in persons into Bangladesh, in its domestic component and from this country to the rest of the world. The study is aimed to create the basis for a recurrent reporting system on human trafficking in Bangladesh.

A comprehensive national response to trafficking in persons in Bangladesh exists. Criminal justice actors focused on curbing trafficking in persons can be found in many government agencies, including police and lead ministries: namely MoHA and MoLJPA. The establishment of seven anti-human trafficking offence tribunals across the country in 2020 provides yet another building block for expanding the criminal justice response to trafficking in persons.

In FY2021-2022, the government reported 632 cases recorded against 2,984 accused persons with police under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012, of which investigation has been done for 487 cases at the end of the year. A Human Trafficking Prevention Monitoring Cell has been formed at the police headquarters to monitor the anti-trafficking activities of the Bangladesh Police at the field level. Various instructions are issued from this cell to prevent human trafficking. Besides, Bangladesh Police is conducting awareness activities in this regard at the local level through community policing and beat policing. On the other hand, the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) has been continuing its effort to reduce human trafficking in the border. In FY2021-2022 BGB rescued 49 women, 10 children and 25 smugglers from the border and filed 52 cases.

There is a National Anti-Human-Trafficking Authority which is responsible to undertake and implement appropriate measures for the prevention and suppression of human trafficking and for the identification, rehabilitation and protection of, and for providing services to, victims of human-trafficking, and to monitor and manage the above measures. In addition, MOHA leads the inter-ministerial committee for combating human trafficking by implementing the National Plan of Action (NPA) for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking 2018-2022 (updated to 2023-2025), which met bi-monthly to coordinate government activities<sup>209</sup>.

The Public Security Division under MOHA runs a Taskforce on rescue, repatriation, and reintegration of the trafficking victims, supported by NGOs and international organizations. The activities of the Taskforce include maintaining databases, training of police, coast guard, BGB, rescue repatriation and reintegration of victims and also support the victims for livelihood. Besides at the district level there is a Counter Trafficking Committee in each district.

The government supported several other taskforces and committees to monitor progress on anti-trafficking efforts and to harmonize efforts between government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations. The government continued to support the Counter Trafficking Committees at district, sub-district, and union levels to facilitate coordination between local

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<sup>209</sup> Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of Home affairs, “National Plan of Action (NPA) for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking 2018-2022 (updated to 2023-2025)” 2023, [https://mhapsd.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mhapsd.portal.gov.bd/publications/flcca6bc\\_35b6\\_443c\\_8445\\_c96a54214bb5/NPA%20updated%20to%202023%20-%202025.pdf](https://mhapsd.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mhapsd.portal.gov.bd/publications/flcca6bc_35b6_443c_8445_c96a54214bb5/NPA%20updated%20to%202023%20-%202025.pdf), (accessed in 07 October 2024).



governments and civil society to combat human trafficking. It is worth mentioning that the government, in coordination with partners, continued to implement the National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking 2018-2022, which was extended through 2025, and incorporated a reference to internal trafficking for the first time.<sup>210</sup> The government allocated BDT 2 million (USD 17,094) for trafficking prevention, including the implementation of the National Plan of Action.

The NGO Affairs Bureau's (NGOAB) prime objective is to provide one-stop service to the NGOs operating with foreign assistance and registered under the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act 2016. In addition, it facilitates the activities of the NGOs in the country and ensures their accountability to the state and thereby to the people of the country. The NGOAB works under the Prime Minister's Office as a regulatory body of the government. The NGOAB approved several projects of NGOs which are concerned with the rehabilitation and prevention of violence against 'prostitutes' and their children. Brief information about different projects related to preventing violence against prostitutes and their children are placed below.

### **3.5.4 Eliminating discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls**

The Government of Bangladesh has made notable efforts over the past five years to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child. Notable progress has been witnessed in the areas of education, prevention of child marriage, and prevention of child labour.

Bangladesh continues to implement the Education Policy 2010 that seeks to improve girls' educational attainment, lessen the gap between girls' and boys' educational opportunities and rates, and integrate women into the mainstream of development. Furthermore, the country is implementing the National Information and Communication Technology Policy 2018 that refers to providing female students with a thorough understanding of ICT expertise has been embraced under the umbrella of women's development.

Introduction of stipends and school-feeding programmes have contributed to increased enrolment in education. For example, the education rate of girls from minority ethnic groups in the plains has increased through the distribution of education scholarships and bicycles under the Development Assistance Program for Special Areas.<sup>211</sup> The government has also worked to improve sanitation facilities in schools, particularly by building gender-segregated toilets and ensuring access to menstrual hygiene management products to reduce absenteeism among girls during menstruation.

The Government of Bangladesh remains steadfast in its implementation of the National Action Plan to End Child Marriage 2018-2030, with the aim of completely eliminating child marriage by 2041. The Child Marriage Restrain Rules 2018, adopted to clarify the procedures to apply the special provision in the Child Marriage Restraint Action 2017, remain to avoid its misuse. The government worked relentlessly to development of IT system to check the age of bride and groom

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<sup>210</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Bangladesh*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/bangladesh/>, (accessed 31 July 2024)

<sup>211</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Progress Towards Equality: Gender Budget Report 2024-2025, 2024*, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/98c2d08b\\_5cdc\\_4a69\\_9c5f\\_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20\(2024-25\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/98c2d08b_5cdc_4a69_9c5f_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20(2024-25).pdf), (accessed August 2024).

using birth certificate, national identification, secondary school certificate (SSC), or higher secondary certificate (HSC), which helps prevent child marriage by verifying the age of the couple involved. Licenses of marriage registrars and notary public have been terminated for their involvement in child marriages.

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, UNFPA and UNICEF, are implementing the flagship "Global Programme to End Child Marriage". The Phase II (2020–2023) interventions in Bangladesh have resulted in the establishment of drop-in safe spaces for girls around the nation. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs is in charge of carrying out the project. Thus far, over 25,000 teenage girls have benefited from these safe spaces, commonly referred to as "Kishori Resource Centres," which also offer life skills training, sexual and reproductive health education, and positive possibilities.<sup>212</sup> In addition, thirty new videos and 150 news pieces on the topics of eliminating child marriage and empowering girls have already been made. 480 young journalists from 24 districts have also received training.<sup>213</sup> In 2024, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, UNFPA and UNICEF, launched Phase III (2024-2030), targeting the most marginalized communities across the country, which will focus on strengthening the legal framework against child marriage, increasing education completion rates, and shifting social norms by leveraging the Government's social protection schemes and engaging with communities.

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) has initiated the "National Multimedia Campaign on Prevention of Violence Against Children and Child Marriage" in 2024 with technical assistance received from UNICEF. The campaign is a component of the "Accelerating Protection for Children" project managed by MoWCA with support from UNICEF. The project's goal is to address the high rate of child marriage and violence against children in Bangladesh by creating a national and subnational child protection system and increasing institutional capability.

Bangladesh has taken a major step in its battle to eliminate child labour. Notably, Bangladesh ratified the ILO [Minimum Age Convention, 1973 \(No. 138\)](#) in 2022. The ILO Convention No. 138 sets the minimum age to enter the workforce at 15 years of age. It also gives countries the opportunity to establish, in consultation with organisations of workers and employers, the minimum age at 14, which Bangladesh has elected to do, reaffirming the age limit enshrined in current Bangladeshi legislation. A National Action Plan 2021-2025 to Eliminate Child Labour has been formulated with the aim of freeing the country from all forms of child labour to achieve the SDG targets. The Ministry of Labour and Employment has formed four-tier committees to coordinate child labour activities in the country. These committees are: (a) National child labour welfare council at national level, (b) divisional national child labour welfare council at division level, (c) district national child labour welfare council at district level, and (d) upazila child labour monitoring committee at sub-district level.

The government has implemented the fourth phase of the project "Eradication of Hazardous Child Labour from Bangladesh" which concluded in December 2023. Through the project, 100,000 children have been withdrawn from hazardous work. The project provided six months' non-formal education and four months' skill development training and monthly stipend of BDT 1,000 for 10 months to each child through the mobile banking system. Moreover, BDT 13,000 per child has

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<sup>212</sup> UNFPA, Action Leads and Hope Prevails: Success in Ending Child Marriage - Bangladesh, *ReliefWeb*, 18 December 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/action-leads-and-hope-prevails-success-ending-child-marriage>, (accessed August 2024).

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

been provided as seed money to set up a small business. Based on a feasibility study conducted in June 2023 a project entitled ‘Elimination and Rehabilitation of Child Labour’ to eliminate child labour from all sectors of the economy is currently underway. The Child Labour Unit of MOLE has been strengthened with additional human resources. Various awareness raising activities have also been conducted on a regular basis.

### **3.6 Environmental conservation, protection, and rehabilitation**

**Critical areas of concern:** Human rights of women, Women and the environment, The girl child.

#### **3.6.1 Integrating gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies**

Bangladesh is one of the world's most climate-vulnerable countries due to its high population density, socioeconomic environment, and climatic factors. Among the main natural catastrophes that impact Bangladesh are earthquakes, tornadoes, cyclones, and floods. The number of people affected by disaster per 100,000 in the northwest and coastal regions was 12,881 in 2016 but dropped to 4,318 in 2019.<sup>214</sup> In terms of strategy and policy, the adoption of the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 in 2018 marked a significant turning point. This is an all-inclusive risk management plan for climate-related and other hazards. The government has set a target to lower the number of people affected by disasters to 1,500 per 100,000 population by 2030, given that the frequency of disasters is expected to grow with the acceleration of global temperature rise.<sup>215</sup>

**Climate Change Gender Action Plan:** Underscoring the unique challenges of women in coping with climate change, MoEFCC took the initiative to revise the CCGAP to address the increasing climate change risks, acknowledging that gender equality is a critical driver of climate resilience and sustainable development. Originally developed in 2013, the revised CCGAP includes, for the first time, a dedicated priority on women’s leadership, in addition to five other areas: natural resources, livelihoods, infrastructure, gender-responsive implementations; and capacity-building, knowledge management and communication. The CCGAP lays out a roadmap for the sustainable integration of gender in climate efforts in Bangladesh and offers specific action plans, measurable progress indicators, and prospective stakeholders, establishing a strong basis for gender-responsive climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies.

**National Adaptation Plan of Bangladesh:** MoEFCC initiated the formulation of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) 2023-2050 in recognition of the critical role that effective medium- and long-term adaptation strategies play in mitigating the adverse effects of climate change and advancing sustainable development. The primary objective of the NAP is to establish an achievable path to climate-resilient development and minimize climate risks and vulnerabilities. The NAP incorporates several gender-responsive strategies to reduce risks for women and girls, recognizing their unique vulnerabilities to climate change. The goal of the NAP implementation process is to close the gender gap in access to financial, technological, educational, and livelihood resources. The NAP refers to implementing climate-smart technology with gender considerations,

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<sup>214</sup> Brac, ‘National Perspective on SDG 13’, *Advocacy for Social Change*, 2024, <https://www.brac.net/SDGs/goal-13.html>, (accessed 15 August 2024).

<sup>215</sup> General Economics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *Sustainable Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report 2022*, 2022, [https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b\\_4dc1\\_4744\\_be4a\\_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book\\_compressed.pdf](https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b_4dc1_4744_be4a_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book_compressed.pdf), (accessed August 2024)

women's specific needs, and overall socioeconomic suitability in mind. To address loss and damage from climate change-related disasters, the plan aims to develop insurance products that are inclusive and gender responsive. Transformational capacity building initiatives have also been incorporated to empower vulnerable communities with the necessary skills and capacities while prioritizing the needs of women, people of different gender identities, the elderly, people with disabilities, youth and children, ethnic communities, urban slum dwellers, climate migrants, and other socially disadvantaged groups.

**Climate Prosperity Plan:** In order to combat climate-related damage and losses, the Climate Prosperity Plan 2022-2041, is an ambitious initiative to transition from vulnerability to resilience and climate prosperity. The plan refers to undertaking measures for vulnerable communities by adopting efficient financing tools and models. The plan adopts a new risk management paradigm that promotes resilience and stability, particularly for small businesses, vulnerable populations, and the economy. Greener air, greener health initiatives, much increased mobility for all, and unique support plans for the most marginalized and vulnerable groups particularly women, individuals with disabilities, and those suffering from mental illness have been included in the plan.

**Local Government Initiatives on Climate Change project:** The “Local Government Initiative on Climate Change” (LoGIC) project, a collaborative effort by the Government of Bangladesh, UNDP, UNCDF, the European Union, Sweden, and Denmark, has made significant strides in promoting gender equality and climate resilience. Originally a four-year initiative, it was extended for an additional two years till June 2023. Since its inception in July 2017, the LoGIC project has focused on supporting the most climate-vulnerable communities in seven districts, including Khulna, Sunamganj, Kurigram, Bagerhat, Barguna, Patuakhali, and Bhola. Over its six-year duration, the project has empowered 1.97 million individuals, with 56 per cent of them being women, through its Community Resilience Fund (CRF) and Performance Based Climate Resilience Grants (PBCRG), and capacity-building support.<sup>216</sup> The initiative disbursed USD 12.26 million to 42,500 project participants as financial support through the CRF, implementing climate adaptive livelihoods options. Additionally, USD 9.14 million was disbursed to 72 union parishads and 19 upazilas as PBCRG to implement 916 climate-resilient community-level schemes, benefiting 300,000 people, including 58 per cent women.<sup>217</sup> Notably, 68% of these adaptation schemes received additional co-financing, further amplifying their impact.<sup>218</sup>

**Sustainable Forest and Livelihood Project:** The “Sustainable Forest and Livelihood” project (SUFAL), implemented by the Bangladesh Forest Department under the MoEFCC (2018-2024), has made significant strides in advancing gender equality in sustainable forest management. Notably, each of the 203 Cooperative Forest Management Coordination Committees includes at least one woman, 615 committees have a minimum of two women members, and each of the 3,075 sub-committees maintains gender parity.<sup>219</sup> There are now 183 core committees, exceeding the

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<sup>216</sup> Local Government Division, *Local Government Initiative on Climate Change (LoGIC) Project*, <https://www.logicbd.org/about-logic-project/>, (accessed August 2024)

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Progress Towards Equality: Gender Budget Report 2024-2025*, 2024, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/98c2d08b\\_5cdc\\_4a69\\_9c5f\\_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20\(2024-25\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/98c2d08b_5cdc_4a69_9c5f_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20(2024-25).pdf), (accessed August 2024).

initial target of 150, with 33% women members. Of the 41,000 beneficiaries, 18,984 are women, including 2,230 from minority groups. The project has fostered women's participation and empowerment by offering vocational training, alternative income opportunities, and involvement in forestry activities.<sup>220</sup> Beneficiary women have received BDT 42,000 (USD 359) each from the Vocational Training and Livelihood Development Fund, contributing to their economic independence through various forestry-related activities.<sup>221</sup> Additionally, 30,177 women (45.27%) in cooperative forestry programs have received skill-building training, enhancing their capacity and preserving vital natural resources.<sup>222</sup>

Women's advancement has also progressed in water management and biodiversity conservation, primarily through ensuring women's participation and representation. In accordance with 'Participatory Water Management Rules 2014', the empowerment of women has been ensured with the inclusion of 30 per cent women members in the contract labour teams for construction and maintenance of minor infrastructure works, inclusion of 33 per cent women members in Water Management Organizations, and provision to include two female members out of six members in the executive committee of water management groups for carrying out earthwork.<sup>223</sup> In conservation, 160 women have been included as members of the 25 Village Conservation Groups formed in Hower and Barendra areas through the "Ecosystem-Based Approaches to Adaptation in the Drought-Prone Barind Tract and Hower Wetland Area" project to deal with the inevitable impact of climate change. Additionally, 30 per cent of women work in forest conservation activities implemented under social forestry projects. Additionally, across the country's 51 protected areas, 50 per cent of poor and destitute women have the opportunity to participate in biodiversity conservation activities. In addition, 30% or more of women are represented on local planning committees.<sup>224</sup>

### **3.6.2 Actions for integrating gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction**

The government is resolutely dedicated to enhancing national disaster preparedness and response through the adoption of cutting-edge tactics like anticipatory action, which guarantees prompt interventions to lessen the effects of impending disasters. As part of fortifying the core of emergency response, the Government of Bangladesh has given significant weight to the establishment of a Humanitarian Staging Area to provide capacity for strategic prepositioning and receipt of emergency assistance. The government is implementing the National Plan for Disaster Management and the Standing Orders on Disaster 2019 which refers to incorporating gender and social issues in the training curricula on disaster preparedness, risk reduction, humanitarian, and psychological aid.

The Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 aims to ensure long term water and food security, economic growth and environmental sustainability while effectively reducing vulnerability to natural hazards

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024*, 2023,

[https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (accessed 16 September 2024)



and building resilience to climate change and other delta challenges through robust, adaptive, and integrated strategies, and equitable water governance.

The government incorporates emergency management and disaster risk reduction into its disaster management policy. The country is implementing the Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies of Bangladesh 2016–2020 which was adopted in compliance with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and other international conventions.

The National Plan for Disaster Management (NPDM) 2021-2025 takes a ‘whole-of-Society’ approach for effective implementation of disaster management activities and programmes. The plan refers to design disaster management initiatives, policies, programs, and planning while ensuring the incorporation of gender issues in decision making and participation of women and men in all NPDM 2021-2025 priority actions. It also aims to ensure adequate considerations for people with vulnerabilities across the implementation of NPDM. The plan embraces the leadership of persons with disability, women, children and youth and the significant contribution of the private sector in terms of its effective implementation.

The Government of Bangladesh has implemented several initiatives over the past five years to integrate gender perspectives into programmes on disaster risk reduction and ensure women’s participation and representation. A total of 56,397 women have been trained in various fields of disaster management under various projects, including 5,657 women Cyclone Preparedness Programme volunteers; 8,000 women fire service and civil defence volunteers; 9,540 women members of Disaster Management Committee and 8,200 school girls and teachers at the district, upazila, union level.<sup>225</sup> Women’s representation as Cyclone Preparedness Volunteers has increased slightly since 2020-2021, from 38 lakh women to 38.60 lakh women in 2023.<sup>226</sup> The government has also implemented the “Char Development and Settlement Project-Bridging” 2020-2022 to support landless families who lost their lands due to environmental disasters. The fourth phase of the project offered homes for 155,000 people from 28,000 households residing in different chars of the country.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, *Progress Towards Equality: Gender Budget Report 2024-2025*, 2024, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/98c2d08b\\_5cdc\\_4a69\\_9c5f\\_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20\(2024-25\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/98c2d08b_5cdc_4a69_9c5f_19248d15cda5/Gender%20Budget%20Report%20(2024-25).pdf), (accessed August 2024).

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> A. Azad, Char Development Project: 6,000 Landless Families Getting 7,000 Acres of Land, *The Business Standard*, 16 September 2021, <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/char-development-project-6000-landless-families-getting-7000-acres-land-303130>, (accessed August 2024).

## **Section Four: National institutions and processes**

### **4.1 National strategy or action plan for gender equality**

The BPfA served as the foundation for the first NWDP, which was developed in 1997 under the direction of MoWCA. In order to tackle the new and continuing issues in women's development, the National Women Development Policy was reformulated in 2011. The NWDP 2011 offers a path for safeguarding women's rights and empowering them in order to achieve gender equality and continuous progress in social, political, and economic spheres. The NWDP 2011 cover the following areas: human rights and fundamental freedoms of women; the development of the girl child; eliminating of all forms of abuse against women; the state of women in armed conflict; education and training; sports and culture; women 's role and equal rights in economic activity; poverty elimination; economic empowerment; employment; GRB and gender statistics; technology; food security; farming; political empowering; administrative empowerment; health and nutrition; housing and shelter; environment; pre-disaster, during disaster, and post-disaster; and mass media, in addition to targeted actions for women with disabilities, women from ethnic minorities, and women in distressed circumstances.

A NAP 2013-2020, headed by MoWCA, was developed in 2013 to operationalize the implementation of the NWDP 2011. Across 25 themes, the NAP-NWDP 2013-2020 outlines measures for ministries to carry out in accordance with their duties in order to implement the NWDP 2011's thematic areas. The NAP acts as a guidance for each ministry and division of government to incorporate gender equality perspectives in legislation, annual performance agreements, and mainstream gender in annual budgets and policy formulation. It also helps the creation of work plans that support gender equality and the efficient use of bilateral, international, and national resources for the development of women as a whole. The NAP-NWDP 2013-2020 was developed in a collaborative manner involving discussions and recommendations from representatives from several ministries, women's groups, and civil society.

In an effort to accelerate the implementation of the NWDP 2011, the NAP NWDP 2013-2020, was revised and updated in 2023, to reflect emerging opportunities and challenges. The updated NAP NWDP 2021-2030 provides a comprehensive framework to guide the implementation of the NWDP 2011, across 54 ministries, based on the 12 critical areas of concern in the BPfA and mapped against the SDG indicators and the Development Results Framework of the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan 2020-2025. The NAP NWDP 2021-2030 is divided into three sections. The first section describes the background, objectives, structure, methodology, and timeline for implementing the action plan. The second section incorporates key responsibilities of various ministries and departments, objectives related to women's development, significant challenges, or constraints to achieving gender equality, and evaluation of success in women's development. Unlike the 2013 action plan, the revised NAP includes designated areas of work for each ministry and division based on the thematic areas of the NWDP 2011. The third and final section describes the method of implementation, necessary indicators for monitoring progress, and evaluation and assessment methods for the implementation of the NAP. This includes indicators of success in line with the SDGs and the national indicators.



The NAP-NWDP 2021-2030 will help the government fulfil its obligations under numerous international treaties, agreements, and declarations, as well as the SDGs. Akin, it will also contribute to the country's overall growth and development by operationalizing the NWPD 2011 using a whole-of-government approach.

## **4.2 System for tracking the proportion of the national budget promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women**

GRB began as part of broader financial reforms, especially the implementation of the Medium-Term Budget Framework (MTBF) in FY2005-2006. Since FY2009-2010, the RCGP model has been used to determine the portion of gender allocations in the operational expenditure, with 16 criteria<sup>228</sup> to evaluate the gender sensitivity and relevance of projects and programs undertaken by ministries/divisions for women's development. For FY2024-2025, a separate gender finance module has been adopted in the Integrated Budget & Accounting System (iBAS++) using the GFT model instead of the RCGP model. The model separated budget allocation across an expanded range of thematic areas, rather than by ministries/divisions, by analysing the nature of the programs/activities to enhance the clarity of the gender budget report. The GFT model aligns gender relevance with four thematic areas: women empowerment and enhancing social status; economic participation and equality; increasing women's effective access to public services; and education, health, and well-being for women development. The goals, objectives, mandates, activities, projects, and programs of each ministry/division are reviewed to ensure such alignment. There are 22 criteria under the four thematic areas, of which 17 programs and a gender weightage criterion for targeted gender projects/programs has been assigned in each area. Over the years, the national budget has expanded, along with gender budget. This growth indicates not only economic growth but also a strong commitment to addressing gender-specific concerns within the national fiscal policy.

The Finance Division of the government has been publishing the Gender Budget Report since FY 2009-2010. The report explains how the government allocates funds for women and how it works to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Along with documenting accomplishments by ministries and divisions, the report highlights priority areas for spending on women's welfare. The Gender Budget Report is placed at Parliament during the budget session every year compiled by the Ministry of Finance. The FY 2009-2010 Gender Budget Report covered only four ministries; however, it has subsequently expanded, and in FY2024-2025 the Gender Budget Report encompassed all government ministries and divisions.

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<sup>228</sup> The criteria include: 1) women's access to reproductive and other health services and improved nutrition; 2) access to government resources and services in favour of women; 3) women's education and skills development; 4) reducing overall working hours of women; 5) greater participation of women in production, labour market and income-generating activities; 6) helplessness, poverty, and risk reduction of women through social safety nets; 7) empowerment of women; 8) participation of women in national and international forums; 9) ensuring women's safety and mobility; 10) creation of women entrepreneurs; 11) increasing the social status of women; 12) women's access to law and justice; 13) IT training and access to women; 14) reduction of violence and abuse against women; 15) increasing the capacity of women in disaster mitigation caused by climate change; and 16) participation of women in research and innovation activities. Source: Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, 'Gender Budget Report: 2023-2024', Published in June, 2023, [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/001130ba\\_9cb8\\_4955\\_9f07\\_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20\(English%20for%20Website\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/001130ba_9cb8_4955_9f07_f9ba27ca7de9/Gender%20Budget%20Report%202023-24%20(English%20for%20Website).pdf), (Accessed in August 2024).

### **4.3 Different stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

In order to ensure proper implementation of the BPfA, the government recognizes the role of various stakeholders and actively involves them in both policy development and the execution of action plans. As noted earlier, the NWDP 2011 and the NAP NWDP 2021-2030 have been formulated in the light of the mandate and obligations under the BPfA and other international human and women's rights frameworks. The NAP NWDP 2021-2030 clearly outlines the role of civil society, women's organizations, and the private sector and identifies specific activities that should be undertaken in collaboration with the government. The NAP also contains several activities, joint programs, and consultations with civil society organizations and women organizations to ensure women's participation in decision making.

The NAP NWDP 2021-2030 includes specific responsibilities for MOWCA, the national women's machinery, to ensure regular consultation with other ministries, divisions, civil society, NGO representatives, research organizations, and civil society, as well as coordination among representatives of various ministries, divisions, and civil society for the effective implementation of the NAP. This includes the formation of an Implementation and Evaluation Committee for Women's Development comprised of senior officials from different ministries/divisions, gender focal points, civil society representatives, and technical experts in various sectors, e.g. GRB, economics, and others. The Committee will review relevant reports and the progress of the implementation of the NAP NWDP 2021-2030 on a regular basis.

The government has a dedicated Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs which scrutinizes the government actions in terms of fulfilling obligations under international treaties including the BPfA and the SDGs. The Committee is entrusted to scrutinize all laws, policies, and administrative actions and to monitor the adequacy of the existing national system for the promotion of gender equality. It also reviews the allocation and expenditure of funds in the state budget to support measures to promote gender equality and protect women's rights.

Being part of implementing gender related goals of SDGs, the government places a strong focus on the contribution of NGOs, CSOs and women's organizations to national development initiatives that aim to reduce poverty and advance gender equality. Additionally, the government promotes their involvement in various committees and consultations.

By working with local government organizations, the government is implementing a roadmap for the 2030 Agenda's localization using a bottom-up approach. In order to facilitate the implementation of the SDGs locally and to disseminate messages, multiple consultations were arranged with Members of Parliament (MPs). The government recognizes CSOs' vital role in achieving the SDGs. The government has worked with several women's organizations to strengthen their involvement in the implementation of the SDGs. In a similar vein, systematic

engagement with the younger generation—particularly college and high school students—has begun.

Women's rights activists, researchers, academics, and representatives of women's organizations have all helped to implement and oversee the nation's implementation of the BPfA. The groups offer implementation services such as policy lobbying, economic and legal assistance, community mobilization, and human development. CSOs and women organizations continue to play pivotal roles in influencing legal and policy reforms. For example, the government increased the punishment of rape to death penalty due to mass movement led by civil society and women's organizations in 2020. The organizations are also playing a significant role in shaping public policy through their active engagement in consultations.

Overall, the government has adopted a 'whole of society' approach for the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs and the BPfA while making collaboration and coordination with NGOs, CSOs, women's rights organizations, academia and think tanks, parliamentarians/parliamentary committees, development partners and private sector actors.

#### **4.4 Contribution of the stakeholders to the preparation of the present national report**

The preparation of this report engaged government stakeholders of various government agencies who are directly or indirectly involved in undertaking activities related to the advancement of gender equality. Following the 'Guidance Note for Comprehensive National-Level Reviews,' the methodology included a desk review of state party reports (e.g., CEDAW and Universal Periodic Review [UPR]) and treaty body recommendations, SDG progress reports, and the 8th Five Year Plan mid-term review, among other. The desk review also considered key legal and policy documents, academic literature, research papers, country development reviews. To gather additional information on the BPfA 12 critical areas of concern from relevant stakeholders, a semi-structured questionnaire was prepared following the guidance note, focusing on concrete examples of progress over the past 5 years of implementation. Based on the desk review and information received from the relevant the government stakeholders, a draft report was prepared which was shared with MoWCA and relevant agencies for feedback. The feedback and comments have been duly addressed before finalizing this report.

#### **4.5 Action plan for implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/Universal Periodic Reviews/other UN Treaty body recommendations**

##### **4.5.1 Implementing CEDAW Concluding Observations**

Bangladesh is a signatory to CEDAW. Bangladesh ratified the convention in 1984 with some reservations on Articles 2 and 16 (1)(c). The Government of Bangladesh submitted the eighth

periodic report in 2015 and received several concluding observations, followed by information on the follow-up of the concluding observations of the eighth period report in 2020 evidencing initiatives taken to address the observations. The Government of Bangladesh has prepared the ninth periodic report in 2023. Originally due in 2020, the report was delayed due to COVID-19 and is currently under finalization.

Since the eighth period report, Bangladesh has made reasonable progress in fulfilling the mandate and goals of CEDAW and addressing the concluding observations received.

In relation to legislative frameworks, the CEDAW Committee expressed concern that discriminatory laws persist in national legislation, personal status laws continue to discriminate against women and girls, there is no uniform family code, and the country has not effectively addressed patriarchal attitudes as required by the constitution, among other. As part of reforming personal laws, the country repealed the Family Courts Ordinance 1985 and passed a new Act, namely the Family Courts Act 2023. The law empowers the Family Courts to settle matters relating to divorce, restitution of conjugal rights, dower, maintenance, and guardianship and custody. The Family Courts Act 2023 also refers to establishing family appellate courts consisting of one district judge in each court. With the aim to protect, uphold and ensure equal rights and dignity of every Bangladeshi citizen and to prevent and eliminate discriminatory practices particularly against marginalized sections of society, a draft comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Bill 2022 was placed in the parliament on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2022. The draft law provides administrative and judicial measures to prevent all forms of discrimination in the light of the constitution, including the establishment of an anti-discrimination cell entrusted to form anti-discrimination national, divisional, district and other committees to prevent discriminatory activities, if any. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, the HCD also delivered a landmark decision recognising mothers as legal guardians of children. The judgment held that mothers can now be the sole legal guardian of their children, where it is no longer mandatory to include the names of both parents in all official documents.

The Government of Bangladesh has taken several initiatives with a view to strengthening the national machinery for promoting and protecting women's rights to address the concluding observations from the eighth periodic review. Various measures have been taken to strengthen institutional mechanisms to address gender issues such as increasing human resource, budgetary allocations, providing sector specific experts; strengthening documentation and data management systems; improving infrastructure and logistic support systems; monitoring systems, increased coordination between different project/program activities and the broader strategy formulation processes. Notable achievements include the updating of the NAP NWDP 2021-2030.

In relation to the concluding observations on GBV against women, there have been concerted efforts by the Government of Bangladesh, international agencies, and CSOs to prevention and response to violence against women since the eighth periodic report. The National Action Plan to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Children 2018-2030 was updated in 2018, aligning it with the SDGs and current priorities, with the vision of eradicating violence by 2030. The Evidence Act (Amendment Bill 2022) was amended in 2022, incorporating the admissibility of digital evidence by the court and repealing Section 155(4) under which the prosecutrix of the rape case can be shown as of generally immoral character and amending Section 146(3) making questions about a

rape victim's character possible only with the court's permission. This is a milestone initiative for survivors of sexual violence and a remarkable achievement in establishing women's rights. The government continues National helplines, an app (Joy), and centres continue to operate, provides service to survivors in coordination with local administration, government and NGOs/CSOs. To provide an overall safe and secure online and networked computing environment, the Bangladesh Police has established a Cyber Police Centre to improve the police response to cybercrime swiftly and effectively by providing a national investigative capability for serious cybercrime incidents. For the implementation of the existing legal and policy framework against GBV, and to address discriminatory social norms, awareness raising programs are regularly carried out by MoWCA, as well as other stakeholders.

Actions to address the CEDAW concluding observations have been integrated into national frameworks and plans, to ensure swift implementation, harmonized with commitments made under other treaty bodies and global normative frameworks, such as the SDGs.

#### **4.5.2 Implementing UPR Recommendations**

Bangladesh underwent its fourth cycle UPR in 2023, during the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the UPR. Bangladesh received a total of 301 recommendations, out of which the country has accepted 211 recommendations and noted 90 recommendations.

Out of the UPR recommendations, several focus on issues related to gender equality and non-discrimination. It is noted that the existing measures relating to gender equality and women's advancement will support the implementation of the UPR recommendations. The government is also committed to undertake innovative and pragmatic measures to fully implement UPR recommendations. Following the fourth cycle review, the government has planned for and conducted information dissemination workshops to familiarize relevant stakeholders with the UPR recommendations and identify key actions to address them.

## Section Five: Data and statistics

### 5.1 Most important areas of progress over the past five years to gender statistics

The Government of Bangladesh has made significant improvements in terms of generating and disseminating gender data over the past five years. The government strengthened legal and policy measures, generated gender statistics, established institutional mechanisms, strengthening the integration of gender sensitive data in policies and action plans.

**Legal and policy measures for the development of gender statistics:** Keeping in mind the mandate and objectives of the 8th Five Year Plan, the Government of Bangladesh has taken initiative in 2023 to update the 2013 NSDS to expand its commitments on gender statistics. As a result of concerted efforts from relevant actors in the BSS, the draft NSDS 2024-2030 now includes a comprehensive section on gender statistics.

**Updated gender statistics:** Over the past five years, several specialized and sectoral surveys and censuses have been conducted, providing benchmark data for policy formulation, as well as monitoring of progress against national targets, including the five-year plans and SDGs.

In 2021, with technical and financial support from UN Women's Women Count programme, BBS conducted its first-ever TUS. The survey report found that women spent 7.3 times as much time on unpaid care and domestic work as men, which includes cooking, cleaning, washing, taking care of children and the elderly, and so on. The findings from the survey report have enabled Bangladesh to set a baseline to monitor progress on SDG Indicator 5.4.1 for the first time. Based on the TUS data, the Parliamentary Standing Committee for the Ministry of Planning in 2022 requested the creation of a National Household Production Satellite Account to measure the contribution of women's unpaid work to the economy. In response, BBS, ADB, UN Women and national experts are collaborating to create the Household Production Satellite Account expected to be completed by 2024. A National Satellite Account will enable the country to measure the economic value of unpaid work, bring to public and private attention the contribution of unpaid care and domestic work that underpins our societies and guide decision-makers in crafting overarching evidence-based and gender-responsive policies, programmes, and budgets.

The 17<sup>th</sup> round of the HIES was conducted in 2022, and is considered a landmark for its many distinct features, including the introduction of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), the use of weighing scales for food items, and the introduction of the classification of individual consumption according to purpose (COICOP) for household expenditure.<sup>229</sup> The HIES 2022 includes, for the first time, a separate section on gender statistics.<sup>230</sup> The chapter analysis gender

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<sup>229</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2022, 2023*, [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/57def76a\\_aa3c\\_46e3\\_9f80\\_53732eb94a83/2023-04-13-09-35-ee41d2a35dcc47a94a595c88328458f4.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/57def76a_aa3c_46e3_9f80_53732eb94a83/2023-04-13-09-35-ee41d2a35dcc47a94a595c88328458f4.pdf), (accessed August 2024).

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

gaps in economic opportunities based on HIES 2022 and HIES 2016 focusing on labour force participation, employment, earnings, and access to financial services and mobile use. The World Bank Group has provided technical cooperation on the HIES since 2000, and the HIES 2022 is published under the “[Strengthening Gender Statistics](#)” (SGS) project.

BBS conducted a **SADDD pilot survey** on disaster-affected households, published in 2022. This pilot survey provides critical insights into how disasters impact different population groups by collecting data disaggregated by sex, age, and disability. By doing so, it highlights the unique challenges faced by women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities in disaster situations. This initiative is a major step forward in ensuring that disaster response and recovery efforts are more inclusive and equitable, addressing the specific needs of these vulnerable groups. The SADDD survey underscores Bangladesh's commitment to integrating gender perspectives into disaster management and policymaking, ensuring that no one is left behind in the face of adversity.

The VAW survey, conducted in 2015, filled the vacuum of nationally representative, quantitative data on violence against women in Bangladesh, and has served as critical evidence for policy planning, programme design and resource allocation. The survey also set the baseline for several SDG 5 indicators. To enable a trend analysis, and avail up-to-date statistics on VAW prevalence, BBS, with the support of UNFPA, has initiated the new round of the VAW prevalence survey in 2024.

Other surveys completed and reports published during the past five years include among others: Population & Housing Census 2022, Labour Force Survey 2022, Bangladesh Disaster-Related Statistics 2021, NSPD 2021, Cost of Migration Survey 2020 and Agricultural Census 2019. As part of its gender compendium initiative, BBS has also been publishing a compilation of gender-related data collected through all of its surveys and censuses. The current publication is titled “Women and Men [in Bangladesh: Facts and Figures 2022](#)”.

**Inter-agency coordination mechanisms on gender statistics:** The Statistics and Informatics Division (SID) leads the National Data Coordination Committee based on nine thematic areas of concern, in which the progress against gender indicators under the SDGs are reviewed and monitored. From lead and co-leading ministries, such as MoWCA per SDG indicator, this committee also includes various data producing agencies such as the UN. Additionally, the National GBV Cluster, established in 2016 as part of the Bangladesh Humanitarian Cluster Coordination System, continues to work to strengthen an inter-agency, multi-sectoral coordination mechanism that unites all actors from various clusters, sectors, and areas of responsibility to ensure a coordinated, accountable, and effective approach to addressing GBV. The GiHA WG, chaired by the Department of Women Affairs, conducted several Rapid Gender Analysis of natural hazards throughout the past five years, such as Cyclone Remal and floods in 2020, 2022, and 2023.

SID actively contributes to the work of the Subgroup on [Gender Statistics Training](#), steered by UN Women and The United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific. Related training materials are available and training on gender statistics is planned for Bangladesh.



## 5.2 Priorities for strengthening national gender statistics over the next five year

Bangladesh's priorities for strengthening national gender statistics over the next five years are as follow:

**Strengthening policy measures/programmes for promoting the development of gender statistics:** Bangladesh pledges to continue strengthening its policy landscape for advancing the role and usage of gender statistics. Bangladesh aims to adopt and implement the draft NSDS 2024-2030 in the next five years. The primary objective of the NSDS 2024 is to enhance statistical capabilities and systems, from data collection to dissemination and recognizes evolving data reporting needs, including adaptable statistical infrastructure aligning with international standards, SDGs, and other global frameworks. The draft NSDS provides clear, forward-looking actions on gender statistics, such as the regular production of critical data on VAW and unpaid care and domestic work, and the development of standardized methodologies following international best practices to enhance the governance, production, and use of gender statistics in the BSS, among others. The government will continue to implement measures regarding the integration of gender into the National Statistical System (NSS) involving MoWCA, MoSW, private sector, civil society organizations and development partners.

**Improving administrative-based or alternative data sources to address gender data gaps:** Following the request from UN Statistical Division to advance the use of Citizen Generated Data (CGD) - a non-traditional data source, a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the BBS (the National Statistics Office), BRAC (the representative CSO), International Civil Society Group, and the UN has been formally executed in mid-June 2024. The objective of this MOU is to establish a partnership between the National Statistics Office and CSO on quality data sharing/accessibility and recognizing CGD in SDG monitoring and reporting, particularly to inform the upcoming Voluntary National Review (VNR) preparation to reflect a whole-of-society approach. Furthermore, as per one of the strategic actions of the draft NSDS 2024, a thorough review of the existing Statistical Act of 2013 will be undertaken, focusing on identifying specific sections that need modifications to enforce collaborative data sharing between administrative data producers and BBS. The proposed amendment will be carefully drafted in collaboration with legal experts, stakeholders, and relevant authorities, clearly outlining data-sharing obligations for administrative data producers within the NSS.

**Developing a centralized web-based database and/or dashboard on gender statistics:** As per one of the strategic actions of the draft NSDS 2024, BBS aims to create a centralized web-based database platform for all data producers, allowing them to input data into the system and ensuring it is regularly updated. In addition, the draft also mentions development of a Smart Data Collection System for NSS that will support web-based portals for centralized data management, administration, and reporting. Gender statistics is expected to be integrated into this cutting-edge ICT solution mentioned.

### 5.3 Gender-specific indicators prioritized for monitoring progress on the SDGs

Bangladesh continues to strive towards the ambitious goal of reaching the furthest behind first, through adopting the ‘whole-of-society’ approach and implementing the ‘leaving no one behind’ agenda. Since 2020, the challenge of achieving the SDGs has been magnified by an increase in the frequency and intensity of human-made crises and natural hazards, as well as the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Being part of a comprehensive SDG monitoring framework, Bangladesh developed a unique SDG Tracker that contains an online data repository for accurately monitoring implementation of various initiatives in line with the SDGs leading to efficient resource allocation and effective policy making for inclusive and sustainable development.

The government has identified 40 (39+1) national priority targets (NPT).<sup>231</sup> While coinciding with the indicators of global goals on SDGs, NPT indicators are being modified considering the context and priorities of Bangladesh.

Table 10 Bangladesh SDG National Priority Targets

SDGs	National Priority Indicator <sup>232</sup>
SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Reduce the proportion of the population living below the extreme poverty line below 3% (SDG Indicator 1.2.1)</i></li> <li><i>Reduce the proportion of the population living below the national poverty line below 10% (SDG Indicator 1.2.1)</i></li> </ol>
SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Reduce the prevalence of stunting among children under 5 years of age to 12% (SDG Indicator 2.2.1)</i></li> <li>Ensure the proportion of cultivable land at a minimum of 55% of the total land area.</li> </ol>
SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Reduce neonatal mortality rate to 12 per 1,000 live births (SDG Indicator 3.2.2)</i></li> <li><i>Reduce under-5 mortality rate to 25 per 1,000 live births (SDG Indicator 3.2.1)</i></li> <li><i>Reduce the maternal mortality ratio to 70 per 100,000 live births (SDG Indicator 3.1.1)</i></li> <li><i>Reduce the death rate due to road traffic injuries to 1.2 per 100,000 people (SDG Indicator 3.6.1)</i></li> </ol>
SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure 100% completion rate of primary education</li> </ol>

<sup>231</sup> General Economics Division, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, *Sustainable Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report 2022, 2022*, [https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b\\_4dc1\\_4744\\_be4a\\_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book\\_compressed.pdf](https://shed.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/shed.portal.gov.bd/page/d86a330b_4dc1_4744_be4a_25c38e97e1be/SDGs-Progress-Report-2022-Final-output-file-1-February-2023-Full-book_compressed.pdf), (accessed August 2024)

<sup>232</sup> The NPTs that are gender-relevant indicators, as per the UN Statistics Division (2021) are indicated in purple text and italics.

<p>promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</p>	<p>10. Ensure 100% completion rate of junior secondary education</p> <p>11. Ensure the proportion of students in the technical level above 20% of the total students passed every year in secondary education (SSC, Dakhil, and Vocational)</p> <p>12. <i>Ensure the proportion of schools by 100% with access to the following: A. Electricity; B. Internet; C. Basic drinking water; D. Single- sex basic sanitation facilities (SDG Indicator 4.a.1)</i></p> <p>13. <i>Ensure the proportion of schools by 100% with access to adopted infrastructure and materials for the child/students with disability (SDG Indicator 4.a.1)</i></p>
<p>SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls</p>	<p>14. <i>Reduce the proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married before age 15 to zero (SDG Indicator 5.3.1)</i></p> <p>15. <i>Reduce the proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married before age 18 to 10% (SDG Indicator 5.3.1)</i></p> <p>16. <i>Increase the female labour force participation rate to 50%</i></p>
<p>SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all</p>	<p>17. <i>Ensure 100% population using safely managed drinking water services (SDG Indicator 6.1.1)</i></p> <p>18. <i>Ensure 100% population using safely managed sanitation services (SDG Indicator 6.2.1)</i></p>
<p>SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all</p>	<p>19. Ensure access to electricity for 100% population (SDG Indicator 7.1.1)</p> <p>20. Increase renewable energy share in total final energy consumption to 10% (SDG Indicator 7.2.1)</p>
<p>SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all</p>	<p>21. Increase annual growth rate of GDP to 10% (SDG Indicator 8.1.1)</p> <p>22. <i>Reduce unemployment rate below 3% (SDG Indicator 8.5.2)</i></p> <p>23. <i>Reduce the proportion of the youth population (15-29 years) not in education, employment, or training to 10% (SDG Indicator 8.6.1)</i></p>
<p>SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation</p>	<p>24. Ensure 100% pucca roads (suitable for all seasons) (SDG Indicator 9.1.1)</p> <p>25. Increase Industry (manufacturing) value added as a proportion of GDP to 35% (SDG Indicator 9.2.1)</p> <p>26. Increase manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment to 25% (SDG Indicator 9.2.2)</p> <p>27. Increase the number of entrepreneurs ten times in the Information and Communication Technology sector</p>
<p>SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries</p>	<p>28. Reduce the ratio of income of the top 10% population and the bottom 10% population to 20</p>

	29. Reduce the recruitment cost borne by employees as a proportion of yearly income earned in a country of destination to 10% (SDG Indicator 10.7.1)
SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable	30. <i>Ensure women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities have convenient access to public transport (minimum 20% seats) (SDG Indicator 11.2.1)</i>
SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	31. Ensure 100% of industries install and operate a waste management system
SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts	32. Reduce the number of deaths, missing persons, and directly affected persons attributed to disasters to 1,500 per 100,000 population (SDG Indicator 13.1.1)
SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development	33. Expand the coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas by 5% (SDG Indicator 14.5.1)
SDG 15: Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss	34. Enhance forest area as a proportion of total land area to 18% (SDG Indicator 15.1.1) 35. Increase the area of tree-covered land by 25% in relation to the total land area
SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels	36. <i>Increase the proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority to 100% (SDG Indicator 16.9.1)</i> 37. Increase the proportion of complaint Settlement against cognizance of cases by National Human Rights Commission to 60%
SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development	38. Increase total government revenue as a proportion of GDP to 20% (SDG Indicator 17.1.1) 39. <i>Increase the proportion of individuals using the Internet to 100% (SDG Indicator 17.8.1)</i>

Bangladesh formulated the ‘2nd National Action Plan of Ministries/Divisions by Targets for the Implementation of SDGs’ in 2023 which encompasses the actions of various ministers/divisions identified in the SDGs Mapping Handbook. This Action Plan was designed to effectively implement the goals and associated targets outlined in the SDGs, spanning three consecutive Five Year Plans (7th, 8th, and 9th) in alignment with the Development Budgetary provisions of the Government of Bangladesh. The action plan refers to undertaking specific programmes and projects by all ministries and agencies of the government prioritizing gender specific indicators, among others, in the light of SDG 5 and the country’s development agenda.

Bangladesh prepared a VNR in 2020 that showcased domestic progress, innovative solutions, creative actions, and critical challenges regarding SDGs. The review report highlighted interventions, programmes and projects of the government that led to progress against specific indicators under SDG 5. While addressing the challenges that hinder the implementation of gender equality of SDGs, the report indicated some pathways that need to be undertaken by the government. The next VNR is to be submitted by Bangladesh in July 2025.

The government has revised the monitoring and evaluation framework of SDGs in 2020 accommodating newly generated data against specific indicators including gender specific indicators and adopting gender sensitive approach. Despite such efforts, there are some areas of improvement regarding the collection and dissemination of sex-disaggregated statistics and data on gender issues such as the extent and importance of women's unpaid work, to provide a better information base for policy formulation and programming relating to SDGs.

#### **5.4 Data disaggregation routinely provided by major surveys**

Data disaggregation enables a more nuanced analysis by breaking down broad data sets into detailed subcategories, such as demographic, geographic, or socioeconomic factors, which can shed light of the different situations and experiences of people. In Bangladesh, data is routinely produced through major surveys with disaggregation across:

1. Geographic location
2. Sex/gender
3. Age
4. Disability
5. Marital status
6. Education
7. Race/ethnicity

Examples of data disaggregation in routinely conducted surveys are outlined below.

The Labor Force Survey (LFS) is a recurring survey that is conducted every five years. While containing data regarding key labour market variables, LFS provides statistics on the characteristics of the labour force at the national and divisional levels. To depict the comprehensive trends of the labour force, the LFS 2022 includes sex, age, education, and geographic location, among others, disaggregation. The LFS presented a wider picture of the labour market based on sex and urban-rural disaggregation with national estimates for the aged 15 years and older population. It is worth mentioning that the LFS 2022 revealed that the female labour force participation rate has increased from 36 per cent in 2010 to 42.77 per cent in 2022.<sup>233</sup> Nationally, the labour force participation rate has also increased, with 61.2 per cent in 2022.<sup>234</sup>

The Population and Housing Census 2022 was based on demographic characteristics that include population and growth rate, age-sex composition, marital status, population by religion, disability,

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<sup>233</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Survey 2022 Bangladesh*, 2023, [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-10-25-07-38-4304abd7a3f3d8799fcb59ff91007b1.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-10-25-07-38-4304abd7a3f3d8799fcb59ff91007b1.pdf), (accessed August 2024) .

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

education, working status, mobile phone and internet use, financial inclusion, ethnicity, and return migrants. The Census provides sex disaggregated data by male, female and Hijra. The inclusion of the Hijra community for the first time in a national census indicates the commitment of Bangladesh to foster inclusive societies.

The Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2022 is the ninth national survey to report on the demographic and health conditions of women and their families in Bangladesh. The survey has a comprehensive "Women's Questionnaire" which outlines variable questions alluding to mental health, employment and so on.

The Sample Vital Statistics (SVRS) is a continuous annual data collection survey include household characteristics and demographic composition along with household headship by sex, administrative division, and religion. The SVRS collects data on births, deaths, marriages, migration, disability, and other key demographic indicators on a regular basis and publish reports annually. Since 2022, the SVRS has adopted a CAPI system for data collection, replacing the previous dual recording system and introducing a sample-based validation survey to ensure data quality. Under this system, vital events are collected every month by locally recruited female Local Registrars.

## **Section Six: Conclusion and next steps**

Bangladesh has delivered its utmost commitment and efforts for the fuller implementation of BPfA over the past five years. With this national review report, Bangladesh is well prepared to showcase its progress and achievements in terms of gender equality and women's advancement on the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) which will be held in 2025.

Championing gender equality in South Asia in the last decade, Bangladesh portrays considerable progress and best practices regarding women's empowerment in regional and international parlance. The country has integrated the dimensions of gender equality and women's empowerment across all its development pathways. The remarkable economic progress has enabled the country to progress towards the goals of SDGs that Bangladesh aims to realize by 2030, as well as set the country on the path to graduate from LDC to middle-income country in 2026. While prioritizing actions and promoting practices for the achievement of SDGs, the country has provided due emphasis on attaining gender equality while addressing the challenges and setbacks that hinder the advancement of women.

To localize and implement the gender-related SDG goals and targets, the country continues to undertake specific initiatives, projects, programmes, collaboration, interventions, and action plans by integrating and promoting a gender-sensitive approach. Based on the COVID-19 learnings, the government seeks to optimize the contributions from a variety of stakeholders on the 2030 agenda through improved collaboration and partnership. A fundamental necessity in light of the pandemic's multifaceted effects was to guarantee integrated and systemic approaches. To achieve the ultimate milestone of gender equality and women's advancement, as per the mandate of BPfA and the 2030 Agenda, Bangladesh pledges to continue to emphasize partnership and multi-stakeholder collaboration, improved local governance, enhanced gender justice, and system-wide transformative approaches to gender equality and women empowerment.

It is worth mentioning that the recent student led mass uprising 2024 has paved the way to initiate reform agenda to challenge systematic inequalities and stereotypes gender norms that are embedded in the society. The incumbent interim government, led by Nobel laureate Dr. Muhammad Yunus, has undertaken a massive reform agenda, by forming various reform commissions, to enable fundamental as well as broader societal reforms. The government is committed to recognise and celebrate the unique contribution of women in the July mass uprising that will stimulate effective implementation of gender equality and women advancement agenda in the new Bangladesh. The Chief Adviser Professor Dr Muhammad Yunus, in his speech in the 79th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) called upon the international community to engage with 'new Bangladesh' anew that aims to realize freedom and democracy, beyond letters, for everyone.

In line with this, Bangladesh pledges to highlight the significant role of women, as symbols of leadership and resilience, in decision making and greater engagement at all levels. The reform agenda for women advancement, while aligning with leaving no one behind approach, shall focus on eliminating systematic barriers to women's effective participation. The forward-looking reform agenda shall also include the experiences of grassroots women community and integrate their grassroots resistance and transformative vision in our development landscape.



