



GENDER EQUALITY BRIEF

April 2024

Photo: UN Women/Shararat Islam

GAINS, PROSPECTS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES

Established in 1971, Bangladesh is the eighth most populous country in the world with a population of approximately 169 million. Accelerated income growth in the past decades has made Bangladesh one of the world's emerging economies. Its gross national income per capita increased by about 252 per cent between 1990 and 2021.¹ With a projected annual growth rate of 5.5 per cent in real gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023,² Bangladesh is set to graduate from the United Nations classification of least developed country (LDC) in 2026.³ Celebrating 50 years of independence in 2021, the country has seen a steady rise in the Human Development Index (HDI). It is in the medium human development category and ranks 129 out of 191 countries and territories with a HDI of 0.661.⁴

Bangladesh is among the 193 United Nations Member States working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the commitment to 'leave no one behind'. Gender equality features as a standalone strategic priority of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022–2026 with Bangladesh, denoting the importance of this development area for both the Government and the United Nations system. At the SDG Summit in 2023, the Government pledged to achieve the SDGs by 2030, including specific commitments on women's economic empowerment, eliminating gender-based violence, ensuring women's leadership and participation, increased resilience from crisis and shocks, strengthening gender-responsive budgeting and implementing the women, peace and security agenda.

GLOBAL STANDING

The country is internationally recognized for its good progress on several gender indicators. According to the **2023 Global Gender Gap Report** by the World Economic Forum, Bangladesh has emerged as the top performer in South Asia in terms of gender parity. It garnered a score of 72.2 per cent, placing 59th in the global ranking. Its most outstanding

¹ United Nations Development Programme, [Human Development Report data centre, Bangladesh](#).

² International Monetary Fund, [DataMapper](#).

³ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, [Least Developed Country Category: Bangladesh Profile](#).

⁴ United Nations Development Programme, [Human Development Report 2021/2022, Overview](#).

achievement is in political empowerment where it received a score of 55.2 per cent, ranking seventh in the world. Bangladesh has been acclaimed to be the only country to have had a woman head of state for the longest duration, at 29.3 years out of the last 50 years. Its gender parity achievements were 96.2 per cent in health and survival; 93.6 per cent in educational attainment index; and 43.8 per cent in economic participation and opportunity index, which is still low, but represented a remarkable recovery from its status in 2020.⁵

The same report also noted the priority areas for further advancement, which include: (a) representation in ministerial and parliamentary positions, (b) drop in gender parity in healthy life expectancy, as men's life expectancy increased much faster than that of women since 2020, and (c) parity gaps in literacy rates and enrolment in tertiary education.

NATIONAL SITUATION

The strong commitment of Bangladesh to gender equality and women's empowerment is enshrined in the Constitution. Supporting legislative acts, policies and action plans have progressively been developed, enacted and implemented over the years. Recent data show that 50.6 per cent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education and female participation in the labour market stands at 42.7 per cent.⁶

However, rapid economic growth has exacerbated patterns of marginalization, putting vulnerable groups at risk of being left behind on the country's path to development. Bangladesh has a gender inequality index value of 0.530, ranking 131 out of 170 countries in 2021.⁷ The current population stands at 165,158,616. Of this, 81,712,824 are males (49.48 per cent); 83,347,206 are females (50.51 per cent) and 12,629 are transgenders (0.008 per cent) with a density of 1,119.⁸ The largest share of the population belongs to 15-to-19-year-olds and the lowest belongs to 95 years old and above. The youth population (age 15–24) has also increased from 18.16 per cent in 2011 to 19.11 per cent in 2022.⁹



The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down progress on gender equality, resulting in the reversal of some development gains. Between January and September 2020, violence against women and girls escalated, women's unpaid care work burden increased and many women lost their livelihoods.¹⁰ The pandemic impacted women's health more than men's, intensified pre-existing social and economic vulnerabilities and posed new challenges to social cohesion. A survey conducted by the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in 2020 reported that: (a) more than half of the women surveyed were unable to see a doctor when they needed one; (b) Bangladeshi women in informal employment are more likely than men to see their working hours reduced; and (c) Bangladeshi women in formal

employment were almost six times as likely to work fewer hours than their male counterparts since the outbreak of the virus.¹¹

The Constitution recognizes equal rights for women and men in the public sphere, and there is a reasonably compelling legal and policy framework guaranteeing women's rights. However, people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, or other sexual minorities (LGBTQI+) face violence, discriminatory laws and police harassment. The UPR suggested removing Section 377¹² from the law, creating safe spaces for LGBTQI+ and *hijra*¹³

⁵ Gender equality: Bangladesh ranks best in South Asia 9th consecutive time: [The Business Standard](#)

⁶ [Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey 2022.](#)

⁷ [Human Development Report 2021/2022](#), Table 4, page 293.

⁸ [Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Population and Housing Census 2022: Preliminary report.](#)

⁹ [Population and Housing Census 2022: Preliminary report](#)

¹⁰ International Federation for Human Rights, [Statement on violence against women on the rise amid COVID-19 and rampant impunity.](#)

¹¹ [UN Count report: Unlocking the lockdown: The gendered effects of COVID-19 on achieving the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific](#)

¹² [Section 377](#): British colonial penal code that criminalized all sexual acts "against the order of nature". The law was used to prosecute people engaging in oral and anal sex along with homosexual activity..

¹³ *In South Asia, the term 'Hijra' refers to people who develop a gender identity other than the sex they were assigned at birth. It is often used interchangeably with the term transgender and can also include people who are intersex.*

individuals, and including transgender identities and same-sex relationships in national policies.¹⁴ The UPR also highlighted the issue of excessive government restrictions undermining the right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. It also underscored the dangers faced by human rights defenders and civil society organizations in voicing their concerns without fear of reprisals and intimidation by state agencies.

The Prime Minister has declared gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the 10 priority action areas, and Bangladesh has taken multipronged actions to achieve this goal. The Eighth Five-Year Plan (2020–2025) prioritizes improving women's human capabilities, increasing women's economic participation and security, enhancing women's voice and agency and creating an enabling environment for women's advancement with a key focus on post-pandemic recovery. The 2011 National Women's Development Policy and related National Action Plan provide a base for government action to promote gender equality. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh committed to promoting women's participation in information and communication technologies and to bring women's unpaid household works into the calculation of Bangladesh's GDP at the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council in Dhaka in 2023.¹⁵

Bangladesh has a significant history of strong and vibrant movements spearheaded by women-led organizations asserting that women's rights be respected, protected and fulfilled. Over the years, women's groups have mobilized to ensure their voices are heard on various issues, including: violence against women; gender equality in securing economic opportunities and participation; equal representation in politics; sexual and reproductive health rights; family law reforms; and gender mainstreaming in public policies. In 2020, an intergenerational feminist alliance called "Feminists Across Generations" was formed due to nationwide protest on the increased rate of rape cases in the country. Feminist networks and organisations continue to proactively outline priorities and demands for gender equality in the country's development journey.

GOVERNANCE

Bangladesh has made significant progress on women's participation, representation, and leadership in public life.¹⁶ This has been driven in large part by the extraordinary contributions of the women of Bangladesh, supported by constitutional and legal provisions, including quotas. The Eighth Five-Year Plan and the National Women's Development Policy (2011) emphasize the importance of women's participation in public life, including in public institutions, businesses and trade unions. However, a granular examination of the political space sheds light on a complex picture.



Photo: UN Women/Shararat Islam

Bangladesh ranks 7th out of 146 on the Political Empowerment sub-index of the Global Gender Gap Index 2023.¹⁷ It has female leaders in two key political positions; Prime Minister and Speaker of the House. Fifty (50) out of the 350 seats in the National Parliament are reserved for women under Section 65 of the Constitution, and the Representation of the People (Amendment) Order Act (2009) requires political parties to reserve at least 33 per cent of committee positions for women. Currently, women hold 20 per cent of parliamentary seats, inclusive of the reserved seats for women, a minor decrease from 20.9 per cent in the 11th Parliament.¹⁸

In the 12th national election in January 2024, the Awami League emerged as the dominant force by winning 223 seats. Only two out of the 25 Ministers in the Cabinet Division are women - the honourable Prime Minister and the Minister of

¹⁴ [Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), page 10.

¹⁵ [The Daily Star](#)

¹⁶ [Beijing+25 Review Report, Bangladesh](#).

¹⁷ [Global Gender Gap report 2023](#)

¹⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Bangladesh.

Social Welfare. Six out of the 18 State Ministers are women, a slight increase compared to four in the preceding administration.

Though the country ratified the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984, it continues to maintain reservations to Articles 2 and 16(1c) as they conflict with the religious personal laws.

At the local government level, there are three reserved seats for women in each of the 4,480 Union Parishads (the lowest tier of local government) across the country. At this level, only 44 women (0.79 per cent of the total) hold leadership positions as opposed to 5,541 men.¹⁹ Nine per cent of the 64 Deputy Commissioners are women.²⁰

Bangladesh has made several commitments towards gender equality and women's empowerment, including through various United Nations treaties. In 1984, Bangladesh ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) with reservations and is due for a ninth periodic review. The CEDAW

Committee Concluding Observations (2016)²¹ highlighted that the discriminatory provisions in legislation remain a grave challenge. It is recommended for Bangladesh to adopt a uniform family law as the personal laws, regulating marriage, divorce, inheritance, guardianship and custodial rights within the various religious groups, continue to discriminate against women and girls.

The National Human Rights Commission is active. However, there are concerns regarding fulfilling its responsibilities effectively. The 4th cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2023 highlighted the issue of restrictions undermining the right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. It also underscored the dangers faced by Human Rights Defenders and civil society organizations in voicing their concerns without fear of reprisals and intimidation. Out of the 301 recommendations received, Bangladesh accepted 201 and noted 90, with observations.²²

In Bangladesh, gender-responsive budgeting has increased over the past 10 years, from 28.69 per cent in the 2012/13 fiscal year to 33.89 per cent in the 2022/23 fiscal year.²³ A total of 44 ministries prepared a Gender Budget Report, a slight increase from 40 ministries in the 2013/14 fiscal year.²⁴ Yet, the existing GRB mechanism has not yet reached its full potential in terms of effectiveness and impact. At the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit, the Government committed to increase the gender budget allocation to a minimum of 35 per cent of the national budget by 2025.²⁵ A draft financing roadmap for SDG 5 estimates that USD 53 billion for FY 2021–2030 is required to reach the targets in Bangladesh.²⁶

The Beijing+25 review also recommended strengthening gender-responsive financing as a tool to advance gender equality and emphasized the importance of enhancing the institutional capacity of the national women's machinery.

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on the governance, production and use of gender statistics in Bangladesh's National Statistical System to inform policies, planning, and budgeting. The draft National Strategy for Development Statistics 2024, now includes a dedicated section on gender statistics, outlining strategic actions, such as the regular production of critical data related to violence against women and unpaid care and domestic work, and the development of standardised methodologies following international best standards. Despite its strong capacity and commitment to gender statistics, the availability of gender data in Bangladesh remains uneven across sectors, themes, regularity and timelines. The Eight Five-Year Plan includes specific focus on a regular collection of sex-disaggregated

¹⁹ Haque, Ruaksana, 'Despite a Woman at the Top Bangladesh's Politics are Still Male Dominated', International Republican Institute, 28 October 2021.

²⁰ Ministry of Public Administration, Government of Bangladesh, August 2023.

²¹ CEDAW Committee Concluding Observations on the eighth periodic report of Bangladesh, 25 November 2016 (CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/8).

²² Report of the Working Group: Addendum, 4th Cycle Universal Periodic Review, Bangladesh, 2024.

²³ Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Gender Budget Report 2022-23.

²⁴ Gender Budget Report, 2023-2024, Ministry of Finance.

²⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, SDG Summit 2023: Bangladesh Country Commitments.

²⁶ Draft SDG 5 roadmap (unpublished), UN.

data, improving gender and social analysis skills, including the capacity to develop, implement and monitor gender strategies. All of these are envisioned to ultimately result in improved understanding and response to gender issues facing the nation.

The 8th Five-Year Plan acknowledges that discriminatory practices persist due to deeply-rooted traditional social norms that favour boys over girls. According to the 2023 Gender Social Norms Index, 99.37 per cent have at least one bias against women in Bangladesh, and 68.84 per cent hold bias in political dimensions, such as “men make better politicians than women do”.²⁷ The Beijing+25 Review highlighted the importance of the portrayal of women and girls and eliminating discrimination and gender biases in the media. A national broadcasting policy (2014) is in place, which aims to strengthen broadcasting for development and positive portrayal of women’s productive roles in the mass media. Specific provisions in the policy prohibit negative portrayal of women in the media, including broadcasting any programme that encourages violence or discrimination towards women and children.

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



Photo: UN Women Asia and the Pacific

Violence against women (VAW)²⁸ remains prevalent in the country. The VAW survey (2015) conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) estimated that 72.6 per cent of ever-married women experience one or more forms of violence by their husbands at least once in their lifetime, while 37.5 per cent of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 experience physical intimate partner violence. About 84 per cent of women with disabilities reported experiencing at least one act of emotional abuse or physical or sexual violence from their partner during their lifetime.²⁹

Complementing the upcoming VAW Prevalence Survey 2024 conducted by BBS and UNFPA, UN Women will support BBS to deep dive into unexplored areas of VAW in Bangladesh.

The Human Rights Council Working Group on the UPR report in November 2023 expressed concerns about domestic violence, child marriage and gender-based violence. They highlighted the lack of protection, limited access to justice and insufficient services for survivors, in addition to the barriers to reporting assault or seeking legal recourse – which are often insurmountable – and public prosecutors being poorly trained and allegedly corrupt at times. Laws related to VAW are still discriminatory, especially the definition of rape and family law. The UPR report also recommended creating an independent commission for appointing public prosecutors, passing a witness protection law and replacing the rape law with a comprehensive definition of sexual assault.³⁰

In 2022, the government approved the Evidence (Amendment) Act 2022, section 155(4), that repeals the provisions allowing questions about a rape survivor’s character during cross-examinations in rape trial and contains a provision

²⁷ [2023 Gender Social Norms Index](#), UNDP.

²⁸ The definition of women for VAW includes girls for this brief. UN Women works towards ensuring freedom from violence for women and girls of all ages.

²⁹ UN Women, [Report on Violence Against Women \(VAW\) Survey 2015](#).

³⁰ [Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), page 7.

allowing the submission of digital evidence before a court.³¹ This was a landmark achievement for the Rape Law Reform Coalition and UN Women.

Both CEDAW Concluding Observations 2016 and the Voluntary National Review 2020 have highlighted concerns related to legal reform, women's access to justice, tackling harmful social norms and stereotypes and strengthening the gender-responsiveness of law enforcement and judiciary.³² The limited participation and leadership of women in the justice sector hinders their access to legal and judicial support in time.

Emerging result from the collaboration between UN Women and the Rape Law Reform Coalition is a significant contribution to legal reform efforts and women's access to justice.

An increase in gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual harassment was observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, both offline and online. The needs assessment working group's anticipatory assessment report revealed that 49.2 per cent of women and girls felt that safety and security were an issue during lockdowns.³³ Women and girls, especially women with disabilities and other marginalized groups, are disproportionately affected by disasters and humanitarian

crises, thereby leaving them doubly victimized when accessing GBV services. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted GBV services despite extensive investment from the Government and development partners for a longer period. A survey by Action Aid Bangladesh in 2022 showed that 63.51 per cent (228 out of 359) of women faced online violence, which is an increase of 13.32 per cent from the prevalence rate of 50.19 per cent – a result of a November 2021 survey.³⁴ There was a significant increase of misogynistic comments in articles related to VAW or posts by women since the onset of COVID-19.³⁵

Misconception remains among GBV practitioners – including government and civil society – over VAW prevention programmes, resulting in less-effective implementation of ending VAW in the country. Bangladesh demonstrated success in VAW response through the multi-sectoral programme led by MoWCA. The programme established 13 one-stop crisis centres embedded in medical college hospitals across the country.

In the judiciary system, Bangladesh now has seven women judges (7.4 per cent) out of 95³⁶ in the High Court and 550 women judges (27.5 per cent) out of 2,000³⁷ in the lower courts across the country. Among the 10,373 members in the Supreme Court Bar Associations, 1,636 are women (16 per cent). The Bangladesh Police has established the Bangladesh Police Women Network (BPWN) that represents 16,126 women police officers in the force. The network strives to expand the prospect for women police through networking and leadership. With technical support from UN Women, the BPWN has developed its strategic plan (2021–23) and (2024 - 2027).³⁸ 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.³⁹



Photo: UN Women/ZANALA Bangladesh Ltd

³¹ [New Age, 11 September 2022: Rape victim's character not to be questioned.](#)

³² [United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Bangladesh 65th Session, 2016.](#)

³³ [Needs Assessment Working Group COVID-19: Bangladesh - Multi-Sectoral Anticipatory Impact and Needs Analysis.](#)

³⁴ [Action Aid, Research Findings: Online Violence against Women, 29 November 2022.](#)

³⁵ [UN Women, COVID-19 and Violence Against Women: The evidence behind the talk, UN Women Data Hub, page 6.](#)

³⁶ [Home: Supreme Court of Bangladesh.](#)

³⁷ [1,800 judges for 16.5 crore people... \(daily-bangladesh.com\).](#)

³⁸ [Bangladesh Police Women Network, Strategic Plan of BPWN 2021-23.](#)

³⁹ [Bangladesh Police Women Network Launches 2021-2023 Strategic Plan.](#)

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



Photo: UN Women/Fahad Kaizer

According to the CEDAW Concluding Observations, pre-existing gender inequalities are the key drivers for women's low participation rate in the formal economy and the persistent wage gap between women and men in most sectors. The Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina committed at the UN General Assembly in 2023 to ensure 50 per cent participation of women in all sectors by 2030.

Data from the 2016/17 Labour Force Survey indicates that women remain predominantly in the informal labour force.⁴⁰ Despite progress in recent years, with an increase in female labour force participation from 36.3 per cent in 2016/17 to 42.7 per cent in 2022, there is still a substantial gender gap with the male participation rate being as high as 80 per cent. Only 3.4 per cent of employed women held formal jobs compared to 21.6 per cent of men. This high informality rate exposes women to greater vulnerabilities in their employment. According to the 2021 Time Use Survey conducted by BBS with UN Women's technical and funding support, women spend 7.3 times as much on unpaid care and domestic work than men,⁴¹ which limits their opportunities for paid employment, contributes to their overall time poverty and undermines their wellbeing.⁴² The survey also reports that men spend 6.1 hours in employment-related activities while women spend only 1.2 hours; for unpaid domestic and care work, women spend 4.6 hours compared to men who spend only 0.6 hours; and for unpaid caregiving services, women spend 1.2 hours daily, where men spend only 0.2 hours. Despite significant improvement over time in earning gaps between women and men from 2003 to 2016, discrimination in the wage rate persists.⁴³ Economic opportunities are not evenly spread throughout the sectors for different intersectional groups of women and gender-diverse people. The Eighth Five-Year Plan recognizes that some groups, such as people living in hard-to-reach areas, ethnic minorities and those in extinct occupational groups, are more vulnerable than others. Hence, it incorporates social protection plans with a focus on these groups in line with the commitment to leave no one behind.

To combat the gender digital divide, the Bangladesh Government has undertaken some substantive initiatives under 'Digital Bangladesh'. It includes policies, such as the National Information, Communications and Technology Policy 2009, the National Science and Technology Policy 2011, National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2021-2026, Bangladesh Cybersecurity Strategy 2021-2025 and Bangladesh Mobile Financial Services Regulations 2022. The Government has also established high-tech parks, introduced mobile financial services, telemedicine and online education.

⁴⁰ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force survey 2016 -2017, 2022*.

⁴¹ *Data from the Time Use Survey Report, 2021*.

⁴² *Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UN Women, Time Use Survey, 24 July 2023*.

⁴³ *Government of Bangladesh and International Labour Organization, Draft National Strategy for Promotion of Gender Equality in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Bangladesh, June 2012*.

Over 5,000 Union Digital Centres have been established across the country where 50 per cent of service providers are women. Eighty per cent of female ready-made garment workers receive their salary through mobile phones.⁴⁴ In 2023, affirming gender equality as a constitutional commitment for Bangladesh, Fazilatun Nessa Indira MP, State Minister for MoWCA, articulated the Government's commitment to increase women's participation in information, communications and technology to 30 per cent by 2030 and 50 per cent by 2041 at the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women Ministerial Roundtable.⁴⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the vulnerabilities of women migrants in particular, who sustained major income loss due to forcibly losing their jobs and returning to the country.

Overseas employment is the country's second-largest source of income, and women from Bangladesh constitute around 13.85 per cent of the migration flow abroad.⁴⁶ Women migrants are often subjected to exploitation and discrimination, particularly domestic workers, due to the lack of a gender-responsive working environment and adequate supporting regulations and policies.⁴⁷ Bangladeshi women are driven towards migration by poverty, gender-based discrimination and the limited employment opportunity at home. Between 2013 to 2022, 14 per cent of the migrant workers were women. Key financial inclusion issues and gaps in Bangladesh include those related to access (about 65 per cent of women do not have bank accounts); the gender gap in mobile phone ownership (only 58.8 per cent of women above the age of 18 have a mobile phone for self-use, compared to 86.7 per cent of men);⁴⁸ loan disbursement (only seven per cent of small and medium-sized borrowers are women); demand-side obstacles (e.g., unfamiliarity with bank procedures); supply-side challenges (e.g., location of bank branches, social norms, and others); lack of credible sex-disaggregated data; and low female participation in the sector workforce (only 15 per cent of the workforce is female and women occupy only around eight per cent of top-level positions).⁴⁹ Additionally, the lack of a gender-responsive working environment and the unpaid care work burden stand as the main barriers to women's participation in the formal economy. The COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, putting them out of business as they had limited capacity to absorb the shocks to remain in the formal economy.⁵⁰

WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY



Photo: UN Women/Md Murad Hasan



Photo: UN Women/Fahad Kaizer

Bangladesh is one of the pioneering inspirations behind the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security and has consistently been a top contributor to United Nations Peacekeeping, including female police and troop contributions. The Government of Bangladesh has acknowledged the *Biranganas* (women who

⁴⁴ [UN Women Asia and the Pacific, Bangladesh holds a National Consultation ahead of CSW67, 23 February 2023.](#)

⁴⁵ [Digital divide: The new face of gender inequality, The Daily Star, 22 March 2023.](#)

⁴⁶ [Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, Labour Migration from Bangladesh 2018.](#)

⁴⁷ Probashi Kalyan Desk, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

⁴⁸ BBS, Population and Housing Census 2022 page 19.

⁴⁹ Asian Development Bank, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Diagnostic for the Finance Sector in Bangladesh, December 2022.

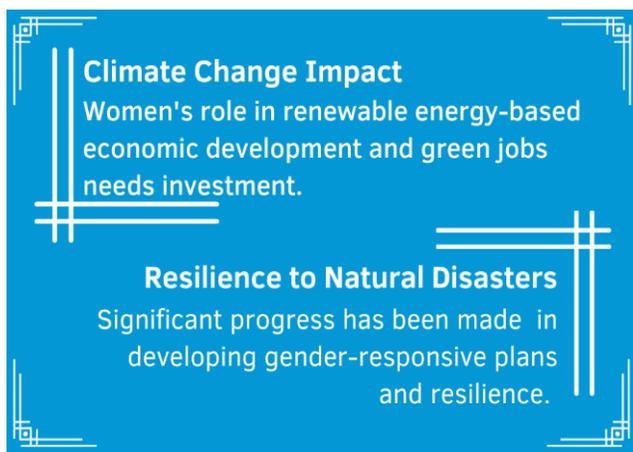
⁵⁰ [UN Women Policy Brief, Supporting the recovery of women entrepreneurs and women's micro, small, medium enterprises from the impact of COVID-19 in Bangladesh, November 2020.](#)

survived sexual violence in the 1971 Liberation War) as freedom fighters⁵¹ and allocated a monthly stipend to support them to live a life with dignity. In 2019, the country launched its first National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (NAP-WPS) 2019–2022, with funding and technical support from UN Women Bangladesh. The Government decided to extend the NAP-WPS period until 2025 and has reiterated its firm commitment to fulfilling the women, peace and security agenda.⁵²

In post COVID-19 Bangladesh, intolerance, misogyny, hate speech and extremist ideologies in the virtual space – especially towards women – have increased, according to a recent analysis by UN Women.⁵³ Extremely vulnerable groups, such as indigenous women, women with disabilities and the LGBTQI+ community, remain invisible in the WPS agenda.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to climate change and its impacts, including increased natural disasters. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction estimated the average annual losses to disaster at around USD 3 billion, or around one to two per cent of GDP.⁵⁴ According to the Global Climate Risk Index (CRI) by Germanwatch (2021), Bangladesh ranked seventh among the top 10 most affected countries (2000–2019) in terms of long-term CRI.⁵⁵



At COP28 (United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties), held in Dubai in November 2023, a historic agreement was made to formally establish a loss and damage fund to support especially vulnerable countries dealing with the effects of climate change.⁵⁶ While there have been strong advocacy to increase funding for locally-led adaptations from Bangladesh as one of the most climate-affected countries, UN Women showcased stories of successful women-led locally-led adaptation initiatives at a side event, which only strengthened Bangladesh government’s commitment to finance such community-based women-led adaptation interventions.⁵⁷

UN Women has been supporting and strengthening the capacity and leadership of grass-root women-led organisations (WLO) and women’s rights organisations (WRO). This cohort of 100 WLO/WROs are advocates for gender mainstreaming in climate change actions and DRR. They have become the faces and voices of the most at-risk women at national, regional and international fora.

While the wide-reaching impacts of climate change threaten and exacerbate socio-political and economic vulnerabilities, women face the maximum brunt of climate change. The Government recognizes that environmental sustainability is key to making economic transformation meaningful. Bangladesh has assumed the presidency of the 48-nation Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) in 2022 and the Vulnerable Twenty Group of Finance Ministers.⁵⁸ As CVF Chair (2022-2024), Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina finalized the ‘Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan’ for Bangladesh, focusing on shifting Bangladesh’s trajectory from one of vulnerability, to resilience, to prosperity. Alongside this are other initiatives, such as the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, the National Adaptation Plan and the Delta Plan, which were put in place to promote green development, green jobs and solar energy. In November 2023, the Government approved the revised Climate Change and Gender Action Plan (CCGAP, 2023) with support from UN Women. This enables the government to mainstream gender in climate change actions.

⁵¹ National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2019-2025)

⁵² [Dialogue on Women, Peace, and Security: Prothom Alo.; SDG Summit 2023: National Statement of Commitment](#)

⁵³ [UN Women, In brief: Big Data Analysis on Hate Speech and Misogyny in Four Countries: Bangladesh, Indonesia, The Philippines and Thailand.](#)

⁵⁴ [World Bank Group, Climate Risk Country Profile: Bangladesh; World Bank](#), page 3.

⁵⁵ [Global Climate Risk Index](#), page 13.

⁵⁶ [World Economic Forum.](#)

⁵⁷ [Bangladesh highlights women’s leadership in climate adaptation at COP28.](#)

⁵⁸ [Bangladesh’s leadership of the Climate Vulnerable Forum | The Daily Star](#)

Monsoon floods, flash floods and cyclones have become a common phenomenon due to climate change. The UPR report highlighted the impact of flash floods in 2022, and recommended following through on commitments under the National Plan for Disaster Management 2021–2025 by ensuring that people with disabilities are meaningfully included both in disaster response planning and in identifying risks and solutions to impacts of extreme weather changes.⁵⁹ The Bangladesh Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) working group⁶⁰ produced two rapid gender assessment reports during the Chattogram division flash flood and monsoon rain in 2023⁶¹ and the flood situation in North and North-Eastern Bangladesh in 2022.⁶² The assessments highlighted issues of access to shelter, safety, security and protection, food and income, reproductive health services and WASH facilities, keeping women and most marginalized communities in consideration as well as immediate and long-term key recommendations.



Photo: UN Women/Mohammad Rakibul Hasan

Bangladesh has achieved remarkable success in building resilience to disasters. Noteworthy progress has been made in developing gender-responsive disaster risk reduction plans with support from United Nations agencies, including UN Women. Both the revised Standing Order on Disaster and the National Plan for Disaster Management are gender-responsive; and a Protocol and Guidelines for collecting sex, age and disability disaggregated data, as well as a Gender Marker for Infrastructure, are in place. Ministries, local government units and a number of practitioners have increased capacity for gender-responsive resilience. Furthermore, the resilience of some of the most at-risk women living in flood- and cyclone-prone districts has been enhanced through UN Women’s technical interventions along the gender-humanitarian-development nexus.

ROHINGYA RESPONSE

It has been more than six years since the forced mass displacement of Rohingya people from Myanmar to Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, and the need for durable solutions is urgent. Roughly 961,000 Rohingya refugees reside in Cox’s Bazar and on Bhasan Char Island in a protracted crisis situation, over half of whom (52 per cent) are women and girls.

The Government of Bangladesh has continued to provide refuge to Rohingya refugees throughout the crisis, while emphasizing the need for safe, sustainable and dignified repatriation. This has also remained the stance of the United Nations, as also reflected by the statement of the Secretary-General on 25 August 2023,⁶³ calling for comprehensive, inclusive and durable solutions addressing the root causes of the systemic discrimination and violence in Myanmar and acknowledging the commitment and generosity of the Government of Bangladesh through shared responsibility.

⁵⁹ [Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Summary of stakeholders’ submissions on Bangladesh*](#), page 8.

⁶⁰ The Inter-Cluster Gender in Humanitarian Action (GIHA) Working Group, founded in 2017, comprises United Nations agencies, local and international non-governmental organizations and local non-governmental organizations led by women. It is co-chaired by UN Women and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

⁶¹ [UN Women Asia and the Pacific, Rapid Gender Analysis of the Chattogram Division Flash Flood and Monsoon Rain 2023.](#)

⁶² [UN Women Asia and the Pacific, Rapid gender analysis of flood situation in North and North-Eastern Bangladesh, 2022.](#)

⁶³ [Secretary-General Calls for Comprehensive Solutions to Address Discrimination, Violence in Myanmar on Sixth Anniversary of Rohingya Displacement, August 25, 2023.](#)



Photo: UN Women/Liz Pick



Photo: UN Women/Pappu Mia

The United Nations launched the Joint Response Plan (JRP) 2024 in March 2024 that seeks USD 852.4 million to provide life-saving assistance and support to one million Rohingya refugees and more than 345,000 Bangladeshis in the community.⁶⁴ The United Nations, including UN Women, supports the Government of Bangladesh in its response through the JRP, which is severely underfunded. Of the 2023 JRP funding appeal of USD 875.9 million, only USD 470.8 million had been mobilized by June 2023. Malnutrition among refugees is projected to rise to emergency levels due to food ration cuts in 2023. In addition, protection concerns are on the rise, with armed violence at its highest level since the start of the crisis in 2017. A decline in humanitarian funding and the absence of livelihood opportunities for refugees present the risk of a broader humanitarian crisis emerging again in Cox's Bazar, exposing women and girls to heightened risk of vulnerability. While local women's rights organizations are well positioned through their contextual knowledge and networks to contribute to the humanitarian response, this is also at risk as resources decline.

Restrictive gender norms and the lack of formal mechanisms to ensure women's representation and influence in decision-making continue to limit women's agency and voice in refugee camps and the host community and imperil their safety. Camp level monitoring and community outreach by UN Women indicates that gender-based violence incidents are on the rise and that refugees are increasingly resorting to negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage and polygamy and falling victim to trafficking. In the host community, poverty and vulnerability remain extremely high in specific locales, and restrictive gender norms limit women and girls from exercising their right to self-realization and agency. Gender-diverse persons and women and girls with disabilities in both the camps and host community remain at higher risk of marginalization and abuse due to stigma and discrimination. UN Women is strengthening its support to social cohesion activities and awareness raising of women's rights among women and men in both communities.

Initiatives such as Multi-Purpose Women's Centre as well as the coordination mechanism of Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) have made significant contributions in ensuring gender-responsive humanitarian interventions.

Multiple service and support systems are in place and supported by United Nations agencies in partnership with the Government to address issues related to women's health, safety and security at the camps and in host community. UN Women continues to implement its activities in close coordination and collaboration with others, enhancing coordinated approaches and shared responsibility through GiHA and strengthening services to women and adolescent girls in the camps and host community through engaging partners in service delivery at UN Women facilities. The multi-purpose women's centres (MPWCs) supported by UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund are working to ensure sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls at the camps. Joint monitoring visits with United Nations Children's Fund have resulted in the identification of learning spaces in MPWCs for the provision of secondary education in a safe learning environment for adolescent girls. UN Women and the United Nations High Commissioner

⁶⁴ [Joint Response Plan 2024](#).

for Refugees have collaborated to identify gaps and opportunities at the camp level with regard to women's participation and gender mainstreaming. As agreed within the GBV sub-sector, UN Women is leading joint monitoring of the proportion of women in camp management positions, which remains extremely low. UN Women and UNDP are working on a joint gender and security analysis of the situation in the camps.

As Bangladesh works towards LDC graduation and achieving the SDGs, the priority remains to continue addressing the persistent inequalities and vulnerabilities faced by women, girls and gender-diverse people in the country for an inclusive, equal and sustainable future. Hence, financing gender-related interventions, investing in research and gender statistics, creating space for civil society and giving voice to women and gender-diverse people are crucial.



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