

FWF GENDER FACT SHEET - BANGLADESH

FACTS & FIGURES

- Human Development Index: 136 of 189 countries (UNDP 2018)
- Gender Inequality Index Rank: 134 of 160 countries (UNDP 2018)
- Global Gender Gap Index Rank: 48 of 149 countries (WEF 2018)
- Birth rate: males: 100% / females: 95% (low for female – European average 105%)
- Literacy rates: males: 75.62% / females: 69.9%. Ranked 114th (UNESCO 2006)
- Lifetime physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence: 53% of women
- Physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in the last 12 months: 24% of women
- Child marriage: 59%
- Ever married women who reported experiencing some form of violence in their life time: 87%

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Gender gap:

- Bangladesh has come a long way in **closing the gender gap**, climbing from 91 out of 144 countries in 2006 to 48th of 149 countries in 2018 (WEF 2018).
- Bangladesh is also the **top performer in South Asia on the ‘political empowerment’** gender gap component, in which it is ranked 5th (WEF 2018).
- However, **the gender gap on ‘economic participation and opportunity’ has been widening** in terms of women’s labour force participation and earned income (133 of 149).
- And Bangladesh scored **0.542 on the Gender Inequality Index for 2017**, ranking 134 out of 189 countries.

Employment:

- Bangladesh has experienced rapid growth and development in the past decade, with an **average GDP growth of 6.4% since 2010**.
- The garment sector of Bangladesh, the biggest contributor to the country’s export earnings, is now the second largest exporter of ready-garments after China, and according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), **employs around 4.2 million workers**; though some sources cite **over 5 million workers**.
- Statistics show a **decline in representation of women in the workforce**, from the oft-cited 80% to **women only composing 55-60%** of the garment sector workforce.
- **Unions represent less than 5% of all factories**.

Upward mobility:

- Women are **underrepresented in leadership positions** across all sectors.
- FWF research among stakeholders found discrimination in pay is less common, but there is still **widespread discrimination against women in terms of upward mobility**: 95% of the management positions, including line supervisors, are usually given to men, while 95% of the lower positions (operators/helpers) are given to women.
- Certain A category factories are, however, taking conscious steps towards erasing this gap. **Some factories have now been known to hire only female line supervisors**.

Gender-based violence (GBV):

- Bangladesh is a society with **deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs** and practices that are sometimes harmful to women.
- According to a recent report by Action Aid Bangladesh, **more than 80% of Bangladeshi women have faced verbal or physical harassment** while running errands or commuting by public transport. Most said that they would not report harassment to the police, while two thirds have limited their movement outside their home due to the risk of harassment.
- Based on FWF research, it is clear that GBV is a relatively common occurrence in the garment sector; however, **both the perpetrator and the victims are often thought to be unaware of what qualifies as GBV**. Workplaces are marred with **verbal and psychological abuse** towards women by senior male colleagues, and **mid-level management are often incapable** of handling such issues.
- Another setback in 2017 was the passing of legislation that **allows girls under 18 years to be married** under special circumstances.

Health

- In 2011, **under a quarter of all births** were attended by a professional health physician.

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- **Sex-selective healthcare and infanticide** of females suggest a correlation between the ratio of females to males in Bangladesh. (The European ratio is 105 women to 100 men, while Bangladesh is 95 to 100).
- This is primarily due to **insufficient health care provided for young girls**, according to economist Amartya Sen. Men, followed by boys, are the largest groups of people admitted into hospitals. Women family members are less likely to receive modern medical care and are generally recipients of traditional remedies.
- Women also face challenges such as **lack of access to reproductive health rights, inadequate nutrition, lack of day care and breastfeeding facilities, and safety issues** related to the workplace commute.
- According to FWF research among stakeholders, although the state allows workers in the private sector to get up to 4 months of paid leave (compared to 6 months in the public sector), **very few factories give the full maternity benefit**. In some cases, women still lose their jobs for being pregnant.

LEGAL CONTEXT

National legislation

- Although the **Constitution of Bangladesh** states that **women have equal footing with men** in all spheres of public life, it also recognises **religious personal laws, which are unequal to women**. Four significant events in the life of a woman: marriage; divorce; custody of children; and inheritance rights are governed by personal laws, based on religious and social value systems.
- **National laws and policies to prevent and respond to violence against women** in place include the Prevention Of Cruelty Against Women And Children Act Bangladesh (2000) and the Labour Code of Bangladesh (2006), which has measures against sexual harassment. Other laws include measures protecting women against 'eve-teasing', stalking, and acid crimes.
- In 2009, the Bangladeshi Supreme Court passed a milestone judgement in response to a Public Interest Litigation filed by the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), which **defined sexual harassment** (which not only includes unwelcome physical contact but also verbal remarks and non-verbal gestures) and laid down directives in the form of recommendations to protect women from sexual harassment in the workplace and in educational institutions. The judgement instructs employers to set up **sexual harassment complaint centres** in their workplaces and to **authorise Anti-Harassment Committees (AHC)** to investigate grievances.

However, **weak enforcement of these laws** is common due to a weak judiciary, corruption, and societal tolerance.

International Legislation

Bangladesh has ratified most international conventions related to gender, including:

- **CEDAW** - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (with reservations on Articles 2, 13.1[a], 16.1[c], and [f] due to conflicts with Sharia law of Islam.)
- And 35 ILO conventions, including **(C111) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention**, 1958.

SOURCES:

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