



Women's and Girls' Rights, Equality, and Empowerment: The Real Picture



March 8, 2025

Ministry of Women and Children Affairs

ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has published this booklet to present a comprehensive picture of women's and girls' rights, empowerment, and gender equality in Bangladesh. This booklet includes information and data from various reports published by different government agencies, especially the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Some information was collected from reports published by different development partners. Therefore, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and the Directorate of Women's Affairs cannot be held responsible for the accuracy and sufficiency of the information presented in this booklet. Much information was analyzed and presented considering the fiscal year of 2022-2023, the publication period of most of the information. During the analysis of the information, limitations were observed in some cases.

This booklet contains information that may be distressing to some readers. While highlighting the positive progress made in the rights, empowerment, and gender equality of women and girls, it also presents information on child marriage, physical and sexual violence, various forms of women's and girls' murder, and maternal mortality. The government remembers with respect and expresses its sorrows for the victims of these incidents.

Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights and the country's criminal laws. If you are experiencing gender-based violence, call the National Helpline at 109, 999, or 333 for all the information of government assistance related to the provision of essential services and life-saving supports.



PREFACE

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has published a booklet on the International Women's Day, 2025, to show the overall picture of the rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls in society and where the progress towards establishing gender equality has slowed down. The booklet titled "Women's and Girls' Rights, Equality and Empowerment: The Real Picture" provides information on the progress in various indicators of the rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls in society. It also presents the picture of discrimination in some areas, which sheds light on further strengthening our collective efforts.

The horrific picture of violence perpetrated by men against women and girls in Bangladesh certainly terrifies us. The government is taking urgent steps with all relevant stakeholders in implementing a national plan to prevent all forms of violence against women. Simultaneously, women should not feel that they have nowhere to go and therefore have to stay in violent relationships. To change this perception, women and men from all walks of life need to come forward. In addition, unpaid care and domestic work are some of the main obstacles for women to become economically independent. We need to take concrete steps to remove these obstacles. At the same time, in ensuring a women-centered approach to the rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls, women's participation in political leadership and policy-making positions must be increased.

We know that ensuring the rights, equality and empowerment of women and girls is a long-term process that faces many obstacles. However, investment must be continued to ensure women's safety and economic equality, eliminate pay inequality, value unpaid care, improve women's health, increase women's leadership and decision-making in various spheres, and change negative social stereotypes. Since childhood, girls are instilled with gender attitudes that limit and harm their independent mobility. More investment is needed to change these stereotypes. They also need to be made aware that their opinions are valuable. In addition, they need to be inspired by the examples of successful women in different sectors of society to develop themselves into skilled and competent individuals.

The implementation of the government's agenda on the rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls requires the support, commitment, and advice of all. We hope that the recommendations and indicators presented in this booklet, which focus on the rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls, will provide all stakeholders with a valuable perspective. This information can assist in updating national policies and action plans, as well as in taking collective action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.



Sharmeen S Murshid

Honorable Advisor

Ministry of Women and Children Affairs



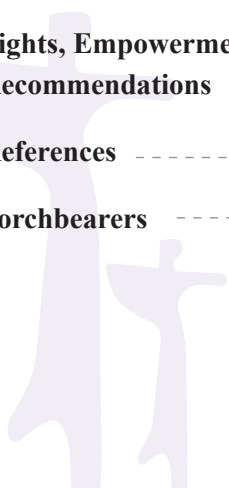
Mamtaz Ahmed NDC

Senior Secretary

Ministry of Women and Children Affairs

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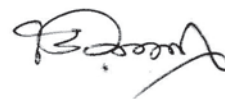
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For the first time, the booklet titled “Women’s and Girls’ Rights, Equality, Empowerment: The Real Picture” has been jointly published by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) and the Department of Women’s Affairs (DWA) on the International Women's Day, 2025. Shabnam Mustari, Additional Secretary and Project Director, Establishment of 20 Child Day Care Centre Project, has written and prepared this booklet in both Bengali and English languages for and on behalf of DWA and MOWCA. Assistant Directors, Ms. Anisa Afroz, Dalia Mousumi Khan, Jahan-e-Gulshan, Mosammat Shahnaz Khanam, Asha Roy, Hosne Laila, and Program Officer Raihana Azhar Swarna of the DWA assisted in collecting information to prepare the booklet. In addition, Arunima Tahsin, a graduate student of Dhaka University, assisted in the research and data collection and UN Women provided technical assistance in the preparation of the booklet under the overall supervision of Shabnam Mustari.

All the information used in this booklet were collected from various government departments and agencies. Special thanks to Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, Director General, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and Mr. ASM Humayun Kabir, Director General, National Identity Registration Wing, Bangladesh Election Commission for their cooperation in providing the necessary information. Many thanks to the officials of all other ministries including the Finance Division who have cooperated by providing many information. Thanks to all the officials of MOWCA who have cooperated by providing information and advice at various times. Thanks also to the officials of the "Strengthening Services to Prevent Violence against Women and Children " program of MOWCA for providing information. Heartfelt thanks to the staff of the "Establishment of 20 Child Day Care Centers Project" of MOWCA for their overall cooperation in preparing the booklet. Finally, thanks to UN Women for producing multiple copies of this booklet in both Bengali and English languages.



Keya Khan
Director General (Grade-1)
Department of Women Affairs



1 | Introduction

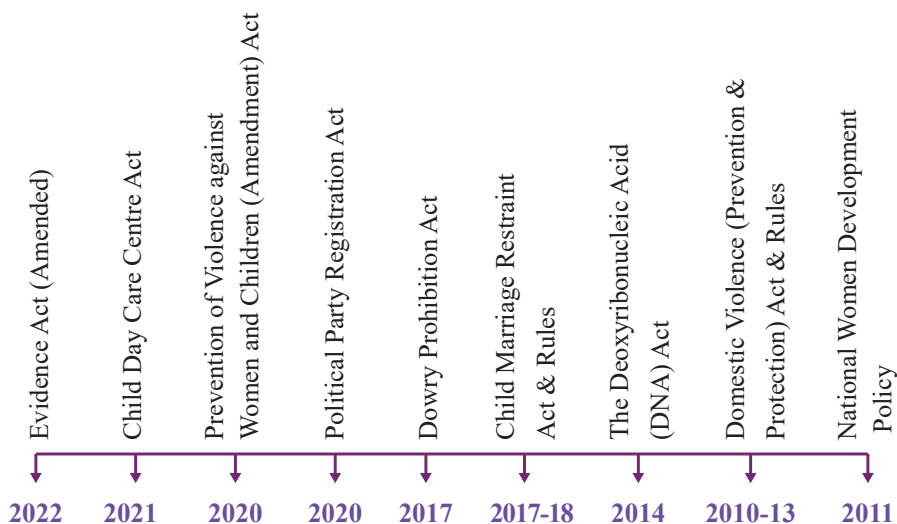
1. Introduction

The celebration of International Women's Day 2025 on March 8 is to celebrate our collective efforts to achieve the rights, empowerment, and gender equality of women and girls across the country. The theme of this year's Women's Day is:

“For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment.”

Given the theme of Women's Day, a booklet titled "Women's and Girls' Rights, Equality, and Empowerment: The Real Picture" has been published for the first time. This booklet highlights the progress made in the rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls in our society while reminding all stakeholders across the country that there is still more work to be done. Recognizing that rights, equality, and empowerment are interconnected and mutually dependent, the booklet includes each of these three areas with distinct indicators. This approach ensures that all three aspects receive equal attention, ultimately reflecting the overall effectiveness of the policies and programs implemented by the government.

The rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls are essential for achieving peace, economic growth, and sustainable development in our society. For this reason, the government's positive approach toward these issues is reflected in important national policies developed in accordance with the country's constitutional provisions, international agreements, and national budget. In continuation of this, the legal framework has been strengthened to fulfill the government's further commitments to the rights, empowerment, and achievement of gender equality for women and girls, which is as follows:



In addition, gender-responsive budgeting has been incorporated into the national budget framework to promote the rights, empowerment, and equality of women and girls. In the last five years, the percentage of the national budget allocated to the gender-responsive budget for supporting the government's policies and action plans aimed at achieving women's rights, equality, and empowerment across 43 ministries is as follows:

Gender Responsive Budget ³					
	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Trends	29.80%	32.88%	33.74%	34.09%	34.11%

As part of the global community, Bangladesh has made significant progress in various indicators concerning the rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls, as highlighted in the Global Gender Gap Report, 2023, published by the World Economic Forum. The report shows that Bangladesh ranks highest among South Asian countries in the Gender Gap Index. However, national statistics reveal that girls and women still fall short in crucial areas such as child marriage, access to higher education for women, unpaid care and domestic work, violence against women, the gender pay gap, asset ownership, and participation in political leadership and policy-making positions. There is also a lack of structured methods and data for regularly monitoring these indicators. Therefore, addressing these gender-based data gaps is essential for achieving the rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls.

The ages of 9 to 13 are crucial for the healthy development of girls. During this period, many girls experience sexual harassment and other forms of violence as they approach puberty. They also struggle with their gender roles and face psychological stress. The prevalence of highly attractive images and videos of girls on various digital platforms, combined with a lack of independent mobility and mentorship during their physical and mental development, further exacerbates their vulnerability. Additionally, financial dependence on family networks contributes to these challenges. As a result, many girls experience a significant decline in self-confidence, face early marriage, achieve low educational attainment, and suffer from malnutrition.

The country is currently experiencing a critical period marked by social and political polarization, new instances of violent conflict, climate change, natural disasters, and various calamities, all of which are making life increasingly difficult for its citizens. Women, in particular, are becoming more vulnerable in these challenging times. In this adverse time, it is essential to conduct gender- and age-specific analyses and develop targeted action plans. This approach will enable the optimal use of gender-responsive budgets across all government ministries and departments. In this context, indicators of the three areas presented in the booklet will serve as a valuable and effective resource for policymakers to assess progress in achieving women's rights, equality, and empowerment, allowing for comparisons with other countries.

2 | A Realistic Picture of Achieving the Rights, Empowerment, and Equality of Women and Girls



2. A Realistic Picture of Achieving the Rights, Empowerment, and Equality of Women and Girls

The rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls are interconnected, which is why their progress is often reported together in national and international documents. To regularly assess and analyze the advancements made in these areas in Bangladesh, this booklet focuses on three key areas, using various indicators. These indicators were developed by collecting and analyzing data from secondary sources of different government institutions.



2.1 Rights of Women and Girls

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines the rights of women and girls as the right to live free from violence and slavery, to receive an education, to earn fair and equal wages, to own property, to vote, and to express their opinions freely. To assess the progress in establishing these rights, data has been compiled on indicators related to access to education, child marriage, physical and psychological abuse, food security, reproductive health, property ownership, and, importantly, the right to express opinions freely.

The indicators outlined here align with the seven thematic areas mentioned in the Gender Budget Report by the Finance Division. These areas include: social security; access to public property and services; safe movement; cybersecurity; the reduction of violence and oppression; access to law and justice; access to reproductive health care and nutrition; as well as specific gender policies and strategies. Over the past five years, the percentage of the national budget allocated to gender-responsive initiatives among 43 ministries for program implementation has been as follows:

Gender Responsive Budget ³

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Trends	13.6%	14.6%	13.2%	12.4%	12.1%

■ The Real Picture of Establishing the Rights of Women and Girls

Life and Good Health

28.9%

Anemic

28.9% of women aged 15-49 are affected by anemia. ¹⁸



39.08%

Pregnancy support

39.08% of pregnant women received support during their pregnancy. ¹⁰



163

Maternal mortality rate per thousand

The maternal mortality ratio in 2020, per 100,000 live births was 163 compared to 178 in rural areas. ¹⁰

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Trends	165	163	168	153	136

In Bangladesh, 136 women die of pregnancy-related causes per every 100,000 live births. ¹⁰

Education, Skill Development, and Knowledge



72.9%
Women

The literacy rate of women aged 7 years and above is 72.9%.¹⁵

97.81%
Participation in
primary education



13.19%
Dropout
rate



The participation rate of girls in primary education is 97.81%, and the dropout rate is 13.19%.⁸



80.02%
Participation in
secondary education



40.78%
Dropout
rate



The participation rate of adolescents in secondary education is 80.02%, and the dropout rate is 40.78%.⁸



22.1%
NEET

22.1% of young women aged 15-29 are not in education, employment or training (NEET).¹²

Labor and Financial Inclusion



5.6%
Below the extreme poverty line

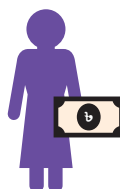
In 2022, 5.6% of female-headed households lived below the extreme poverty line, up from 10.4% in 2016.¹³



14.1%
Below the medium poverty line

In 2022, 14.1% of female-headed households lived below the median poverty line, up from 19.9% in 2016.¹³

For every 100-taka earned by a man for equal work, a woman earns only 78.2 taka.¹²



3.59% of the female labor force in Bangladesh is unemployed. Among these, 82.1% are young women aged 15 to 29 years.¹²

Participation in Decision-Making



12.6%
Female-headed family

Only 12.6% of households in the country are headed by women.¹³



77.4%
Modern family planning methods

Among currently married women aged 15-49, 77.4% use modern family planning methods.¹⁹



5.97

Crores women voters



According to the Election Commission's calculations as of March 2, 2024, 5.97 crore women have gained the right to vote.¹

Freedom from Violence

8.2%

Women

8.2% of young women aged 20-24 are married before their 15th birthday. ¹⁰

41.6%

Women

41.6% of young women aged 20-24 are married before their 18th birthday. ¹⁰

33.2%

Women

33.1% of girls aged 15-19 are currently married. ¹⁷

24%

Women

24% of girls aged 15-19 have been pregnant at least once in their lifetime, and 18% have given birth to at least one live child. ¹⁴



70%

Women

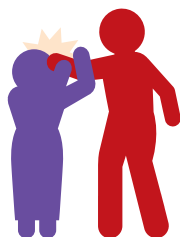
70% of married women over the age of 15 have experienced violence from their husbands in their lifetime, a decrease from 73% in 2015. ⁷



109

Data on violence reported to the National Emergency Helpline 109 from 2020-24. ²

Physical abuse	Sexual assault	Child marriage
371931	6003	5544
Mental torture	Economic violence	
145090	1967837	



Data on violence by husbands among married women over the age of 15. ⁷

Physical abuse	Sexual assault
47.3%	29%
Mental torture	Economic violence
37.4%	19.6%



Instances of women and female infanticide have been reported in various national dailies from 2020 to 2024. ²

Murder by physical violence	:	4837
Murder due to sexual assault	:	280
Murder by fire	:	149



2.2 Empowerment of Women and Girls

To evaluate the progress of women's and girls' empowerment, data on various indicators have been presented. These indicators include women's economic participation, control over resources, labor force participation, political participation, and skill development. They align with the nine thematic areas identified in the Gender Budget Report by the Finance Division. These areas encompass policies and strategies for women's empowerment; political structures and decision-making; enhancement of social status; participation in national and international forums; capacity building for climate change impacts, adaptation, and mitigation; education and skill development; information technology training; research and innovation; and entrepreneurship development. The percentage of the national budget allocated for gender-responsive budgeting to implement programs across 43 ministries in recent years is as follows:

Gender Responsive Budget ³

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Trends	14.6%	14.3%	13.8%	13.6%	14.1%

■ The Real Picture of Women's Empowerment

Life and Good Health



As of 2022, the average life expectancy for women is 74.2 years. ³



77.4%
Modern family planning methods

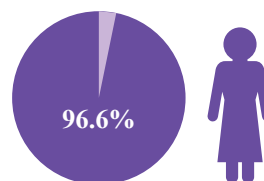
Among currently married women aged 15-49, 77.4% use modern family planning methods. ¹⁹

Education, Skill Development, and Knowledge



1.06%
Women

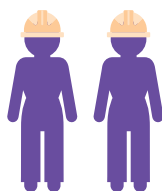
1.06% of women aged 15+ have received technical training outside of formal education. ¹²



96.6% of working women aged 15 and above are engaged in informal employment. ¹²

Labor and Financial Inclusion

The number of women aged 15 years and above is 6.02 crore, of whom 2.57 crore (42.8%) are in the labor force.¹²



The number of young women aged 15-29 is 13.2 crore.¹²

Women workforce	Employed	Unemployed	Not in education, employment or training
51.4%	94.25%	5.75%	27.1%

¹²

2.48 crore working women¹³

75% in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries.

9.8% in handicrafts



10.7%
Women

Only 10.7% of women work at the upper management level.¹²

1.7%
Women

There are only 1.7% of institutional women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.²⁰



10%
Women

Only 10% of entrepreneurs are women, including those in both formal and informal sectors.²⁰

Support for Women's Participation in Economic Activities



Number of children aged 0-6 yrs is 2.22 crore.⁴



Families with 1 child aged 0-6 yrs are 130.95 lakhs.⁴

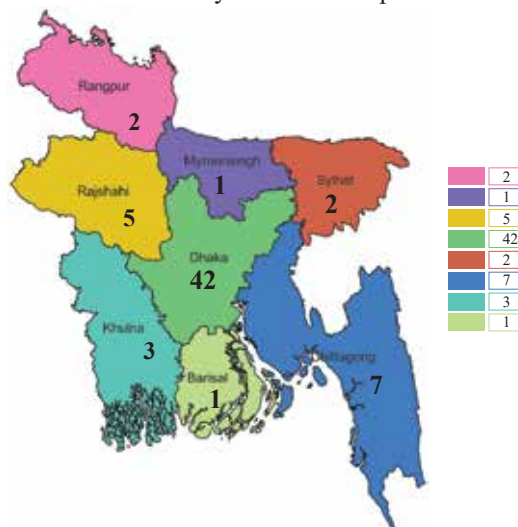


Families with 2 children aged 0-6 yrs are 34.58 Lakh.⁴



Families with 3 children aged 0-6 yrs are 35.81 Lakh.⁴

Number of Child Day Care Centers per Division.¹¹



63 Government Child Day Care Centers are being operated under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, providing services to 4,030 children per month.¹¹



24.5%
Women

Women in Bangladesh spend an average of 24.5% of their time on unpaid household work and caregiving, preventing them from participating in economic activities. ¹⁶



32%
Women

About 32% of married women with cash earnings decide independently on how their income will be used, while 60% decide jointly with their husbands.²¹



39.30%
Women

39.30% of women aged 15 and above have an account with a bank, mobile banking, or other financial institution.¹³



57.75%
Women

57.75% of women own mobile phones for self-use.¹³

Participation in Decision-Making

In the union parishads elections during the 2021-22 fiscal year, only 45 out of 4,058 union parishads were won by female chairman candidates representing 1.1%. ⁶



In the 12th National Parliament, only 20 of the 300 electoral seats were occupied by women elected directly through popular vote representing 6.6%. ⁵

In the 12th National Parliament, only 2 out of 26 Cabinet Members were women representing 7.7%. ⁵

Of the 18 State Ministers in the 12th National Parliament, 6 were women representing 33.3%. ⁵



2.3 Gender Equality

Gender-based inequality continues to exist in various areas, including the family, workplace, politics, government, administration, trade, and in our everyday relationships. To address this issue, the gender budget report from the Finance Division outlines specific action plans that align with five key thematic areas: participation in income-generating activities, the creation of a supportive working environment, women's involvement in the labor market, infrastructure development in remote areas, and access to government jobs. The percentage of the national budget allocated for gender-responsive budgeting across 43 ministries to implement programs in these areas over the past years is as follows:

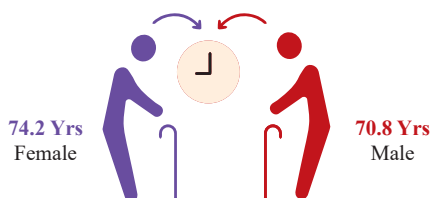
Gender Responsive Budget ³

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Trends	6.8%	7.7%	8.1%	8.1%	7.8%

■ The Real Picture of Achieving Gender Equality

Life and Good Health

Based on 2022 data, the average life expectancy is 74.2 years for women.³



Based on 2022 data, the average life expectancy is 70.8 years for men.³

Education, Skill Development, and Knowledge

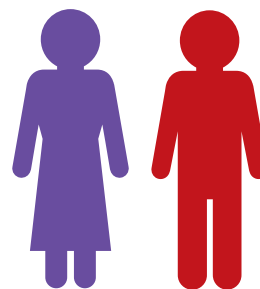
Literacy rate (7 yrs and over), women 72.9% and men 76.7%¹²



1.06% females and 1.87% males aged over 15 attended vocational training courses in the last 12 months out of the formal education system.¹⁵

Comparative picture of male and female participation in higher education^{3, 13}

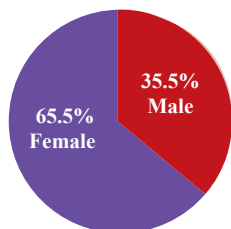
	Female	Male
Bachelor and Masters	8.58%	9.77%
MBBS	0.13%	0.12%
Engineer	0.17%	0.74%
Diploma	0.61%	1.01%
Bachelor in STEM	20.6%	79.4%



STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics



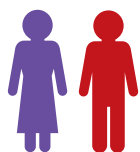
Secondary school dropout rate³



Among 15 to 29 years olds who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), 65.5% are women and 35.5% are men.¹²

27.1% of young women aged 15-29 are NEET, compared to 16.2% of young men.¹²

Labor and Financial Inclusion



For every 100 taka earned by a man for equal work, a woman earns only 78.2 taka, resulting in a gender-based pay gap of 21.8% ¹⁰



Women

BDT 11,093/ Month



Men

BDT 14,180/ Month

The average monthly income for women is BDT 11,093, while for men it is BDT 14,180. ¹²



96.6% Women

78.4% Men

96.6% of employed women are in informal employment, compared to 78.4% of employed men. ¹²



In scheduled banks, the percentage of women employees is 16.29%, while men make up 83.71%. ⁶

Of government employees, 28.34% are female and 71.66% are male. ⁹

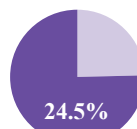
3.59%
Unemployed female



3.5%
Unemployed male

The female labor force participation rate is 42.8% compared to 80% for males. ¹²

3.59% of the female labor force is unemployed, compared to 3.5% of male labor force. ¹²



Women

Men

Women spend up to 7 times more time on unpaid domestic and care work than men. ¹⁶

Participation in Decision-Making

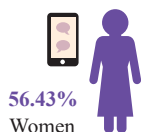
In the 12th National Parliament, there were 70 (20%) women MPs out of 350 seats, compared to 280 men. ⁵

Only 23% of local government representatives are women, compared to 77% of male representatives. ²²

Despite the provision of 33% female representation in each political party, in reality, women's representation in all parties is very low. ¹



Out of every 1,000 people in managerial positions, only 73 are women, representing 7.3%, while men make up 92.7% ¹²



56.43%
Women



84.16%
Men

56.43% of women aged 15 and above own a mobile phone for self-use, compared to 84.16% of men. ¹⁵



5.97 crore women have gained the right to vote. ¹



6.21 crore man have gained the right to vote.

3 Rights, Equality, and Empowerment for all Women and Girls: Recommendations

3. Rights, Empowerment, and Equality for all Women and Girls: Recommendations

The indicators included in this booklet offer a comprehensive view of women's rights, equality, and empowerment, highlighting areas where women are still falling behind. It is essential to focus more on these areas and need a recommitment to reach the intended goals. Here are some recommendations²⁵ for stakeholders to consider:

- Establishing clear goals and setting targets, creating action plans, and setting timelines to achieve gender equality.
- Investing in the collection, processing, production, dissemination, and use of gender-based statistics to increase the availability of country-level gender statistics for tracking progress on women's rights, empowerment, and equality.
- Creating a Fair Work Commission to ensure equal pay for equal work and uphold women's rights.
- Analyzing the factors contributing to the dropout rates of girls in secondary and higher education and implementing effective strategies.
- Implementing effective strategies to enhance access to science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and digital education for the empowerment of girls.
- Developing career programs for women in the construction, advanced manufacturing, technology, and digital sectors to benefit from the various future opportunities created in Bangladesh.
- Focusing on advanced and sophisticated work opportunities for women in the context of technological change, particularly with the rise of artificial intelligence.
- Developing and enforcing effective plans and policies to evaluate, acknowledge, and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work.
- Increasing investments in the high-quality and affordable child daycare services to enhance women's work-life balance and provide better childcare support for families with children aged 4 months to 6 years.
- Evaluating the skills and experiences of women not engaged in training, education, or employment, and providing them with long-term placements in childcare and home care.
- Reviewing discriminatory laws and prevention mechanisms to effectively address violence against women and girls.
- Enhancing women's participation in political leadership and policy-making for fostering a women-centered approach to the rights, equality, and empowerment of women and girls.

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| Torchbearers

The Courageous March of Women in Diverse Roles

Women's participation in historically male-dominated fields has increased significantly. These areas include information and communication technology, banking and finance, administration and management, military and state forces, architecture, engineering, medicine, agriculture, education, economics, law, and journalism, among others. Today, we see many strong examples of women thriving in challenging professions, breaking social norms and customs.



Bangladesh National Women Football Team received Ekushey Padak in 2025



Bangladesh National Women Cricket Team won T20 Asia Cup in 2018



The first batch of Female Firefighter



Women in the Bangladesh Army



Women in the Bangladesh Navy



Female Pilot in UN Peacekeeping Mission



Nishat Majumder,
the first Bangladeshi
woman to conquer Everest



Women participating in ride-sharing services



Salma Khatun, the first Female Train Driver



Mariam Afiza, the first Female Metro Rail Driver



Ajmeri Haque Badhon, the first mother in the history of Bangladesh
to receive full guardianship of her child

Women's Organized Movement to Prevent Violence Against Women and Advocate for Safety in Bangladesh



Photo: Arunima Tahsin

Women of all ages protested on the street against the oppression of women, rape, sexual harassment, and patriarchal power structures.



Photo: Saima Lubna

Women's rally at the base of the Raju Sculpture at Dhaka University to protest the oppression, rape, and murder of women.

Unique Examples of Women's Active Roles in Bangladesh's Struggle for Political and Civil Rights



Language Movement, 1952



Education Movement, 1962



6-Point Movement in 1966



Women in Liberation War, 1971



Women in anti-autocratic movement in nineties

Photo: Website, Liberation War Museum & Internet



Photo: The Daily Star

In 2018, female students joined a movement opposing the 56 percent quota in government jobs.



Photo: The Daily Star

In 2018, Female Students participated in a Road Safety Movement

Anti-discrimination Student Movement and the July Uprising of 2024



Photo: The Daily Star



Photo: Saima Lubna

The active involvement and leadership of women and girls during the July mass uprising.

**For ALL Women and Girls:
Rights. Equality. Empowerment.**

